महाभारत

The Mahābhārata of Vyasa

BOOK XI

THE COMPLETE STRI PARVA

TRANSCREATED FROM SANSKRIT

By P. Lal

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA OF VYĀSA

The Complete Strī Parva
Transcreated śloka-by-śloka from Sanskrit by P. Lāl

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Two birds sit
on the golden bough
of the pippala tree.
One eats
the sweet fruit.
The other watches.
Both are happy.
One is happier.
Which?

Śvetāśvatara
Upaniṣad IV : 6

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महाभारत

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महाभारत

The Mahābhārata of Vyāsa

Transcreated by P. Lāl from the Sanskrit

BOOK ELEVEN

The Complete Strī Parva

The Transcreator

P. Lāl is honorary Professor of English in St. Xavier's College, Calcutta. He was Special Professor of Indian Studies at Hofstra University, New York, 1962-63, and has lectured widely on Indian literature at English, American, and Australian universities. He was a delegate from India to the P. E. N. International Writers Conference in New York in June 1966, and Visiting Professor in the University of Illinois for the spring semester of 1968. Transcreated the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Mahānārānayaṇa Upaniṣads on a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship award in 1969-70. Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature, Hofstra University, spring 1971. Distinguished Visiting Professor and Consultant, Albion College, April-May 1972. Prentiss M. Brown Distinguished Visiting Professor, Albion College, January-May 1973. Robert Norton Visiting Professor, Ohio University, September 1973-June 1974. Visiting Professor of Indian Culture, Hartwick College, September-October 1975. Eli Lilly Visiting Professor, Berea College, February-May 1977. Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Western Maryland College, 1977. Currently at work on the complete English version of the Mahābhārata. Born 1928, married Shyamasree Devi 1955; has a son Ananda, and a daughter Srimati. Recipient of the Padma Shri award in 1970. Delegate to Asian Poets' Conference, Bangkok, 1988; Cambridge Literary Seminar, 1989; Harborfront Poetry Reading Series, Toronto, Canada, 1989. Appointed Suniti Kumar Chatterji Lecturer of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata in June 2005. Seventy five cassettes (each of 90 minutes' duration) of P. Lāl reading his transcreation of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata are available from WRITERS WORKSHOP. In October 1999 P. Lal began a śloka-by-śloka public reading of the transcreated epic to a miscellaneous group every Sunday morning for an hour at the Library of Dharma and Culture in Calcutta to illustrate the importance of Vyāsa's work as an inspiring *oral* experience and not just a print-culture masterpiece, the long-term reading project to proceed till the hundred thousand and plus ślokas are exhausted. 400 hour-long CDs of this recording, taped live are available from WW.

Preface

– But what is the way? Blinded by darkness, how do I see? How does an unwinged bird like me fly? How does an unsonned sun like me shine? Or must I wander over the earth, propelled by my karma to unending cycles of grief?

> – Sire, I bow to the Self-Born One,
> The Source of the shining sun.
> Shine through me like a knife
> Piercing this jungle of life!
> A wandering Brahmin sees
> Himself imprisoned by trees
> Looming like elephants; lions
> And tigers roaring defiance
> At night, whose fetid breath
> Brings Yama, god of death.
> Night, and no one near,
> Alone in that forest of fear.

– The forest is the World, its Limits our life. The lions and tigers are Diseases that strike us down. Night is the Ignorance of the Traveller.

> –So he runs, trembling he flees
> Into trees breeding trees breeding trees,
> And sweating, exhausted, sees
> The wondrous vision of the Other,
> The vision of the Fearful Mother,
> Arms open and free, yet
> Swathing the wood like a net.
> Five-headed snakes at her breast,
> Huddled in succulent rest.

– The giant woman who embraces the forest and suckles the snakes is Decay; Decay suckles and sucks all creatures of the will to live.

> – A massive hole, an abyss
> Oozing dung and piss.
> Jasmine vines on its mouth,
> Scented winds from the south.
> The Brahmin's beguiled; recalls
> Home; steps forward; falls
> And dangles, male jack-fruit

In clutch of creeper and root.
Head over heels in pit
Of spittle and piss and shit.
Below: a giant serpent pants;
Above: six-headed elephants.

–The abyss is the Physical Components of man and other creatures. The snake is Time the All-Devourer, omni-consuming Kala. The tangle of creeper and shoot and root is the throbbing, clutching Desire to carry on living. The six-faced elephants are the Years; the six heads stand for the six seasons.

–The elephant steadfastly treads
On shrub-and-creeper beds,
Where swarms of bees increase
Multitudinous sweetnesses.
A thick honey-drop drips
On the Brahmin's lips;
Third follows second follows first
Quenching insatiable thirst.
I am alive! he says
In delirious daze.
I am alive! Hilarious,
He dangles precarious.
Black and white rats bite
At the roots in the night.
The lion waits,
The Mother horripilates,
The pit-serpent glowers,
The elephant towers,
The bes buzz ominously,
The roots slip perceptibly.

– The rats are the Days and Nights that shorten our span of life. The bees are our Hopes. The drops of honey are our Sensual and Sensuous Pleasures. But what is the way? Blinded by darkness, how do I see? What must I know?

– *I am alive!* he says
In delirious daze.
I am alive! Hilarious,
He dangles precarious.

[P. Lal : *The Man of Dharma & The Rasa of Silence*
a long poem (Writers Workshop, 1974)]

Dedication

to
the kanyās
devis
apsarās
dharma-patnīs
kinnarīs
and other ladies
in the Mahābhārata
whose śakti
energises the kāla-cakra
of the Kṣatriyan cosmos

नारायणं नमस्कृत्य
नरं चैव नरोत्तमम् ।
देवीं सरस्वतीं व्यासं
ततो जयमुदीरयेत् ॥

Nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya
Naraṁ caiva Narottamaṁ |
Devīṁ Sarasvatīṁ Vyāsaṁ
tato jayaṁ udīrayet ||

INVOCATION ~

We namaskāra Nārāyaṇa!
We namaskāra Nara!
We namaskāra finest-of-men Narottama!
We namaskāra Devī Sarasvatī!
We namaskāra Vyāsa!
May victory attend us. We exclaim Jaya!

SECTION ONE

1 "Duryodhana dead," said Janamejaya,
  "all his soldiers dead –
when mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard this,
  tell me, O muni, what did he do?

2 What did the Kaurava mahā-minded
  Dharma's son, rājā Yudhiṣṭhira, do?
And what did the three survivors,
  Kṛpa and the two others, do?

3 I know what Aśvatthāman did.
  But what about
the mutual casting of curses?
  I want to know
what Sañjaya told
  the blind monarch."

4 The loss of his hundred sons
  (replied Vaiśampāyana)
made king Dhṛtarāṣṭra numb
  and dumb with grief.
He was like a tree stripped
  of all its branches.

5 Thinking of his sons,
  he brooded in silence,
deeply depressed.
  Mahā-wise Sañjaya
went to the king
  and said to him:

6 "Why do you grieve, mahārāja?
How will grief help you?
O lord of the earth!
Eighteen *akṣauhiṇīs* of warriors
have perished – there is none left
to help you.

7 The earth has been depopulated.
Emptied. Hollow.
There is nothing left.
So many lords of men
came from so many lands
from every corner,

8 And along with your son
every single one of them
has perished.
You must now perform
the funeral rites of sons, grandsons,
relatives, friends and gurus."

9 Hearing these compassionate words,
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
the formidable monarch,
mourning his sons and grandsons,
slumped on the floor
like a storm-uprooted tree.

10 "Bereft of my sons and ministers
and all my friends,"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
"I am fated
to suffer and wander forever
on this earth.

11 What will I do now
without family
and friends?
I am crippled,
like an old
wingless bird.

12 O mahā-wise Sañjaya!
My kingdom is lost,
my kinsmen are dead.
I am a blind old man.
No more a radiant monarch,
only a dying sun.

13 I spurned the advice
of all my friends:
Jāmadagni-Paraśurāma,
deva-ṛṣi Nārada,
and born-on-an-island
Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana-Vyāsa.

14 Because he wished me well,
Krishna said
in the full sabha:
'O rājā! Control your sons.
What is the point in fanning
family bitterness?'

15 I did not listen to him.
I was foolish.
And I suffer.
Nor do I have Bhīṣma
to help me out now
with words of dharma.

16 Nor is there Duryodhana
snorting like a bull
to speak to me now.
I am told
Duḥśāsana is dead,
Karṇa killed too,

17 Sun-bright Droṇa eclipsed, –
and still my heart
refuses to break into pieces.
I do not remember,
Sañjaya, any karma so terrible
in my past birth

18 Whose bitter fruits
a fool like me
must now taste.
It must be
I committed heinous crimes
in my past birth,

19 For which reason the creator
is punishing me
with such painful karma now.
I am an old man,
all my friends and relatives
are dead.

20 Fate has decreed the doom
of everyone
close to me and wishing me well.
Tell me –
is there anyone in the world
as miserable as me?

21 Let them all come –
all the strict-vowed Pāṇḍavas –
and see this old man
now embark
on the long journey that leads
to the realm of Brahmā."

22 Even as he copiously lamented
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
Sañjaya tried
to console with advice
the sorrow-stricken
Indra-among-men:

23 "O finest of all rājās!
Discard your grief.
The wisdom of the Vedas
and various śāstras
and *āgama* scriptures –
you have heard

24 From munis who consoled Sṛṁjaya
who was desolated
by the death of his son.
O king!
When youthful pride
turned the head of Duryodhana,

25 You refused to listen
to the advice
of well-meaning friends.
He was selfish,
and did not wish to share
his kingdom with anyone.

26 He used his intelligence
like a sharp sword,
thinking only of himself.
He preferred
to surround himself with men
of low character.

27 Duḥśāsana,
the ill-ātmaned Rādheya-Karṇa,
wicked-ātmaned Śakuni,
ill-minded Citrasena –
these were the counsellors
he relied on,

28 Including Śalya,
who true to his name
was like a *śalya*-thorn
in this world.
The Kaurava elders –
Bhīṣma, Gāndhārī, Vidura,

29 Droṇa, and Kṛpa
the son of Śaradvat,
Krishna,
wise Vidura –
O mahā-muscled one,
O mahārāja,

30 Vyāsa of illimitable radiance,
and other ṛṣis –
O Bharata-descendant,
your son resolutely
refused to listen
to what they said.

31 He never had
any regard
for dharma.
The only thing
he desired
was war.
He was dim-witted,
he was egoistic,
and belligerent.
He was cruel,
and revengeful,
and restlessly valiant.

32 You are learned in śruti,
you are wise,
devoted to truth.
A discriminating saint like you
should not succumb
to deluding grief.

33 O monarch most deserving
of respect!
Your son rejected dharma.
He caused this massacre of Kṣatriyas,
he enhanced
the fame of your foes.

34 You stood in the middle,
you refused
to advise him properly.
You had the power,
yet you insisted on weighing
the scale evenly.

35 A man should see to it
that he acts
with justice from the start,
so there is
no need for him
to repent later.

36 You were so fond of your son,
O rājā,
it pleased you to pamper him.
That is the reason
you are suffering now.
But do not grieve.

37 You went for the honey,
you overlooked
the inevitable fall.
You were greedy.
Repentance is the reward
of covetousness.

38 A grieving man never reaches
his goal, never enjoys
the fruits of success.
He loses both:
Śrī the goddess of fortune,
and the supreme felicity.

39 The man who sets fire
to his dress,
and finds himself scorched
by the flames –
surely such a one
is not a learned paṇḍit!

40 You and your son fuelled
the Pāṇḍava-flames
with the ghee-oblations
of your greed
and the fanning wind
of your inciting speech.

41 That same fire has singed
and consumed your sons
as if they were insects.
Why grieve now
for those who perished
in the blazing arrows?

42 Your tear-drenched face, O king,
is poor consolation.
No śāstra-scriptures approve
of such grief,
no learned paṇḍit
recommends it.

43 Your tears are not tears.
They are sparks of fire.
They will consume you.
Be sensible.
Cast off grief. Steady your ātman
by your ātman."

44 O scorcher-of-foes Janamejaya!
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
This was the consolation
offered by mahātmā Sañjaya.
Then it was the turn
of intelligent Vidura.

SECTION TWO

1 O king! O Janamejaya!
(resumed Vaiśampāyana)
Listen now
to the nectar-sweet words
of Vidura
with which
he enlightened
the bull-brave son
of Vicitravīrya,
Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

2 "O rājā!" said Vidura.
"Why are you lying
on the floor? Sit up,
O lord of the world!
Steady your ātman by your ātman.
Everything perishes.

3 All things decay.
What goes up,
must come down.
Meetings end
in partings,
life in death.

4 O Bharata descendant!
O bull-brave Kṣatriya!
The god of death Yama
claims coward and hero.
So what is wrong with Kṣatriyas
locked in battle?

5 Who never fights, dies.
Who fights, survives.
That is the way, mahārāja,
Cosmic Time Kāla operates.
When the time comes,
no one escapes.

6 We were not here.
Then we come here.
Then we disappear.
What is so special about this?
Is this a cause
for grief?

7 Your grief will not take you
to the dead.
Your grief will not mean
that you die.
This is the way things are.
So why do you grieve?

[XI:2:8-13]

Transcreated by P. Lal

8 O finest of the Kauravas!
Cosmic Time Kāla
pulls all creatures
to itself.
Kāla loves none,
hates none.

9 O bull-brave Bharata!
Like blades of grass
blown by the wind,
creatures are scattered
by Kāla
hither and thither.

10 We are all travellers here,
the goal is the same.
Some will reach first.
Cosmic Time Kāla
has decreed this.
So why the grief?

11 As for those who die fighting
in battle, O rājā,
why grieve over them?
The śāstras declare
they are the ones who attain
the supreme fulfilment.

12 They studied the sacred texts,
they were strict-vowed.
They faced their enemy,
and they died.
What cause is there
for grief in this?

13 From the unseen they came,
to the unseen they go.
They are not yours,
you are not theirs.
What cause is there
for grief in this?

14 Die in battle, gain heaven.
Survive, gain fame.
Either way,
you find great merit.
There is no such thing
as failure in battle.

15 O bull-brave Bharata!
There is no doubt
Indra will fulfil
their every desire.
They will be
Indra's favoured guests.

16 Look at the ease with which
heroes who die in battle
gain heaven! –
a heaven unattainable
by yajñas, *dakṣiṇā*-offerings,
tapasyā and knowledge.

17 Into the sacred fire
of the sacrificed bodies
of the heroes, were poured
the ghee-oblations
of the arrows
of their enemies.

18 That is why, O rājā,
I keep saying
there is no better road
to heaven
for a Kṣatriya
than death in battle.

19 They were all mahā-ātmaned,
these Kṣatriyas,
brave and glorious heroes
who attained heaven.
There is no reason
to grieve over them.

[XI:2:20-25]

Transcreated by P. Lal

20 O bull-brave hero!
Steady your ātman
by your ātman.
Cast off grief.
Do not think
of ending your life.

21 So many births and rebirths!
Thousands of fathers and mothers,
hundreds of sons and wives
– today,
who are they to you,
or you to them?

22 Thousands of reasons to grieve,
thousands of reasons to fear.
Day after day,
fools become victims
of grief and fear,
never the paṇḍits.

23 O finest of the Kauravas!
Cosmic Time Kāla
loves none, hates none.
Kāla is not partial.
Kāla merely pulls everything
to itself.

24 Kāla cooks creatures,
and Kāla kills creatures.
Kāla keeps awake
when all else sleeps.
It is impossible
to outwit Kāla.

25 Youth, beauty, life,
wealth, health,
bonding with loved ones –
all these are passing.
Learned paṇḍits
are not attached to them.

26 In every nook and corner,
you will find grief.
Your grief is not unique.
Keep grieving,
and you will die of grief
without reducing it.

27 Have the courage to find
the cause of grief,
and then try to overcome it.
The best cure for grief
is to stop
indulging in it.

28 The more you indulge
in grief,
the faster it grows.
Union with the harmful
and separation
from the lovable

29 Are what make dim-witted people
suffer
psychological anguish.
Your grief-indulgence
will bring you neither artha
nor dharma nor happiness.

30 Forsaking your duty, you will stray
from life's three goals
of artha, dharma and kāma.
The numerous
ups and downs
of fortune

31 Bewilder discontented people,
but learned paṇḍits
remain calm in vicissitudes.
Cure mind-pain with wisdom,
body-pain with medicine.
The foolish never do this.

32 When you sleep, your past karma
sleeps with you;
when you stand, it is there
by your side;
when you run, it runs
alongside you.

33 Do good,
get good karma;
do ill,
get bad karma.
The fruits of karma
are inescapable.

34 Whatever the body
that does the karma
in this life –
the same body gets
the fruits of karma
in the next life.

35 You are your own friend,
and you
are your own enemy.
You witness
your own good
and your own ill.

36 Do good karma,
be happy;
do bad karma, suffer.
Always, everywhere,
your deeds bring fruits –
nothing else does.

37 Discriminating people like you
refrain from deeds
that are not approved
by the learned
and damage the very root
of one's life."

SECTION THREE

1 "O mahā-wise Vidura!"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"Your eloquent words
have dispelled my grief.
But I am eager to hear
more truths from you.

2 How do learned paṇḍits
free themselves
from the pain that arises
from union with the harmful,
and separation
from the beneficial?"

3 "Peace comes to him," said Vidura,
"who devotes his mind
to matters that take him
beyond sorrow and joy.

4 O bull-brave hero!
Clear thinking
shows this world is ephemeral.
This world
is like a plantain tree –
it has no sap.

5 When the wise and the foolish,
the wealthy
and the poor,
freed of all fevers,
lie in the sleep of death
on the funeral pyre,

6 With wrinkled flesh,
bare jutting bones
and shrivelled arteries,
can the living
see in them
any distinguishing marks

7 That will identify them
by their good looks
or their family? Why then
this foolish hankering
for physical beauty
and noble birth?

8 Learned paṇḍits say bodies
are like houses.
Cosmic Time Kāla ensures
they will decay.
But there is one reality
that is eternal.

9 Like a person discarding
an old or new dress
and wearing the latest one,
that reality discards
an old body and puts on
a new one.

10 O son of Vicitravīrya!
Whatever sorrows come,
whatever joys come,
come always
as the result
of one's own karma.

11 O descendant of Bharata!
Karma brings heaven,
or joy or sorrow.
Able or unable,
a man must accept
the burden of karma.

12 Like a clay pot breaking
on the potter's wheel,
or breaking in the process
of making,
or breaking after the making
is complete,

13 Or breaking after sliced
by the string,
or while being removed,
or after removal
from the wheel, wet or dry,
or after firing,

14 Or inside the kiln,
or while being transferred
from kiln to shop,
or while being used, –
that is exactly what happens
to the body of a creature.

15 Some while still in the womb,
some after birth,
some a few days later,
some after a fortnight,
and some
after a month,

16 Some after a year,
some after two years,
some in youth,
some in middle-age,
some in old age –
but they all perish.

17 Our being here,
or not being here,
depends on our past karma.
That being so,
why do you torture yourself
with grief?

18 O ruler of men!
O rājā!
Like a man
playfully swimming,
sometimes diving down,
sometimes bobbing up,

19 All creatures emerge
and submerge
in the stream of life.
Trapped in karma,
dim-witted humans
suffer endlessly.

20 Only the wise who know
the truth of saṁsāra,
of birth-and-rebirth,
and work for the welfare
of all creatures,
attain the supreme goal."

SECTION FOUR

1 "O most eloquent of speakers!"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"This wilderness of a world –
enlighten me about it."

2 The process of creation begins
with conception
(said Vidura) when semen and egg
unite and grow.

3 In the fifth month it becomes
the fleshed foetus
complete with limbs.
After the fifth month,
developing further, it shows
signs of consciousness.

4 It is covered by a semi-liquid
mixture of flesh and blood.
Wind-pressure
next moves
its lower limbs upwards,
head downwards.

5 At the door of the yoni
it faces
a host of obstacles.
Propelled
by its past karma,
the troubled enwombed foetus

6 Emerges from the yoni,
and is beset
with the perils of saṁsāra
which surround
the child like dogs leaping
at a chunk of meat.

7 And so, as time passes,
the little creature,
trapped in its karma,
learns to experience
and endure the perils
and pains of life.

8 O ruler of men!
Fettered by the senses
as if by a noose,
the creature is assailed
by a wide variety
of sense-impressions.

9 Never satiated by them,
he becomes their victim.
He does good karma
and bad karma
without knowing what
is right or wrong.

10 He who assiduously practises
dhyāna-meditation
learns how to protect himself.
Most cannot recognise Yama
even when Yama is knocking
at their door.

[XI:4:11-16]

Transcreated by P. Lal

11 Yama's messenger drags him away.
His good and bad karma
stares him in the face.
He delays; makes no effort
to save himself; he has ruined
his ātman.

12 Aho! Gripped by greed
is this wilderness of a world!
Deluded
by greed, anger and fear,
he does not know
his own ātman.

13 Highborn mocks lowborn,
and enjoys the mocking.
Puffed with pride,
the rich delight
in despising
the poor.

14 "They are fools," they say,
forgetting their own folly.
They are quick to see
the faults of others,
and excuse the same faults
in themselves.

15 When the wise and the stupid,
the rich
and the poor,
the highborn and lowborn,
the respected
and the dishonoured,

16 Freed of existence,
lie in the sleep of death
on the funeral pyre,
with wrinkled flesh,
bare jutting bones
and shrivelled arteries,

17 Can the living
see in them
any distinguishing marks
to identify them
by their good looks
or their family?

18 In the sleep of death
on the bare ground,
they are all the same.
Why then do men
senselessly struggle
to deceive each other?

19 Who spontaneously or assiduously
realises this śruti-truth
that the world is ephemeral,
and from birth onwards
cherishes and practises dharma –
he attains the supreme goal.

20 O lord of mortals!
He, who, knowing this,
abides by the truth,
he is the one
who travels
the path of mokṣa.

SECTION FIVE

1 "Show me a clear way,"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"in detail, through the wilderness –
of dharma."

2 Vidura replied: I namaskāra
Self-Born Svayaṁbhū Brahmā.
Let me repeat
what the supreme ṛṣis
have said about the wilderness
known as saṁsāra.

[XI:5:3-8]

Transcreated by P. Lal

3 There was this Brahmin living
in our material world
who found himself once
in a dense forest
populated by any number
of flesh-eating beasts.

4 A fearful forest, filled
with the mahā-roaring cries
of lions, tigers,
elephants, bears,
and hosts of horrendous
mahā-bodied carnivores,

5 Who so infested the place
that even Yama
shuddered in terror, seeing them.
And the Brahmin,
who was passing through,
was petrified.

6 O foe-scorching monarch!
He horripilated,
and showed other signs of fear.
And so, confused,
he began running wild
here and there,

7 In any direction,
in the hope
of finding a way out.
There was this fear
of wild beasts
chasing him.

8 But there was no escape.
He could not shake off
the wild beasts.
Suddenly he realised
that a massive net covered
the fearful forest,

9 And a fearful female
stood blocking his way
with outstretched arms.
And hill-high,
five-hooded
nāgā-serpents

10 And sky-kissing trees
were everywhere
in that mahā-forest.
In the middle of the forest
was a well,
covered

11 With grass,
and hidden from view
by clusters of creepers.
The unsuspecting Brahmin
fell
in that secret well,

12 But the tangle of creepers
checked his fall,
and he dangled there.
Like a mahā-jackfruit
hanging
from its stalk,

13 He dangled in the well,
feet up,
head down.
And then,
suddenly,
another horror!

14 At the bottom of the well
he sees
a mahā-powerful
mahā-serpent,
at the mouth of the well
a mahā-elephant,

15 A six-faced,
twelve-footed
black-and-white monster,
advancing,
over-shadowing
the creeper-covered top.

16 Swarming on the branches
of the tree
from which he dangled,
fierce bees
of fearful shapes
were ominously

17 Buzzing
around a beehive,
seeking,
O bull-brave Bharata,
to sip
the honey,

18 The honey so delicious
to everyone,
specially to children.
As the streams of honey
trickled down
the branches.

19 The dangling man
licked the drops.
In that crisis,
he kept licking
the drops,
and was not satiated.

20 He was not satiated.
He wanted more and more,
again and again.
O rājā!
He did not lose
his zest for life.

21 Life was such fun,
dangling there,
enjoying the honey!
Black and white rats
were nibbling at the creeper
from which he dangled.

22 The wild beasts,
the fearful female,
the serpent
at the bottom of the well,
the elephant
at the mouth of the well,

23 The fifth fear
the rats nibbling
at the creeper,
the sixth fear the bees
greedily buzzing
around the honey.

24 In the birth-and-rebirth
whirlpool of saṁsāra,
never losing hope
for life, for honey,
hilarious,
he dangled precarious.

SECTION SIX

1 "O most eloquent of speakers!"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"Aho! What a predicament!
What mahā-pain!
And yet he was so happy!
How did that happen?

2 Where did this happen,
this dilemma of dharma?
How did he overcome
this mahā-crisis?

[XI:6:3-8]

Transcreated by P. Lal

3 Tell me everything.
We will do all we can
to save him.
I am moved
by mahā-compassion.
We must save him."

4 This is a parable, O rājā,
about mokṣa
(replied Vidura).
Understanding it
makes a man taste
the bliss beyond.

5 The dreadful region
is the whirlpool
of mahā-saṁsāra.
The dreadful forest
within it
is our world-wilderness.

6 The wild beasts
are diseases
of all kinds.
The massive-bodied
fierce female
blocking the path

7 Is, according to the wise,
old age which ruins
youth and beauty.
The well, O king,
is the flesh-frame
of all creatures.

8 The mahā-serpent
slithering below
is Cosmic Time Kāla,
Antaka,
the destroyer of bodies,
the body-stealer.

9 And the creeper from which
the man is dangling
in the well
is the passion
of all creatures
to stay alive.

10 The six-headed elephant
advancing towards
the creeper-covered mouth
of the well, O rājā,
is said to be
the year.

11 Six heads, six seasons.
Twelve feet, twelve months.
And the two rats
nibbling steadily
at the creeper,
restlessly, remorselessly,

12 Are day and night
shortening, so say the learned,
the lives of all creatures.
And the honey-drunk bees
are kāma-pleasures,
the delights of the senses,

13 And the ceaselessly trickling
drops of honey,
so many of them,
are kāma-rasa,
pleasures and passions,
in which men drown.

14 According to the wise,
this is saṁsāra-cakra,
the revolving wheel
of birth-and-rebirth,
and according to them
it is enlightenment alone
that can break the fetters
of the revolving wheel
of birth-and-rebirth
called saṁsāra-cakra.

SECTION SEVEN

1 "Aho! What a parable!"
exclaimed Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"What a darshan of truth!
Delight me with more
of such deathless words
as sweet as nectar."

2 Listen to me then
(said Vidura)
while I speak in detail
of the road that leads
to liberation from saṁsāra
for those who are wise.

3 Like one, O rājā,
who on a long journey
needs to rest frequently
as he proceeds,

4 A man of small intelligence,
O Bharata descendant,
rests in many wombs
and is repeatedly born,
while a learned paṇḍit
is freed from saṁsāra.

5 That is why those who know
the śāstras compare life
to a long journey,
and those who have insight
compare the mystery of saṁsāra
to a dense forest.

6 O finest of the Bharatas!
This world itself
is the saṁsāra of all life,
moving or unmoving.
But learned paṇḍits
are not dismayed by this.

7 The wise also say that
physical and mental diseases,
and visible
and invisible ailments,
are the wild beasts
that haunt this forest.

8 O Bharata Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
Despite being victims
of these wild beasts,
which are products of their own karma,
small-minded men
never get disenchanted with saṁsāra.

9 A man may escape, O king,
the ravages
of illness and disease,
but there is no way
he can escape old age
ruining youth and beauty.

10 He is trapped in a well
of the flesh,
a mahā-mire of meat
and fat and marrow,
a slush of sound, shape,
rasa, touch and scent.

11 Years and months and fortnights
and days and nights
and the saṁdhyā-twilights
advance inexorably,
ravaging beauty
and reducing life-span.

12 They are the messengers
of Cosmic Time Kāla.
Fools do not realise this.
And there are those who say
it's the creator permitting creatures
to work out their karma.

13 The body of a person, they say,
is the chariot,
the life-essence the charioteer,
the senses, the horses,
karma done with *buddhi*-reasoning
the reins.

14 The chariot's passenger
who is driven along
with the galloping horses
is the one who turns like a wheel
in the cycle
of revolving saṁsāra.

15 But the person who controls
the horses of the senses
is the one
who is free
of the revolving wheel
of saṁsāra-cakra.

16 He moves in the world.
The world
does not move him.
O rājā!
They are unavoidable –
the woes of the world.

17 The wise are they
who assiduously struggle
to break free. Otherwise,
one gets entangled
in the hundreds of branches
of the material world.

18 Peace blesses the man,
O rājā,
who controls his senses,
his anger and greed,
and is self-content,
and speaks the truth.

19 This world is known as the chariot
of Yama, god of death.
and the foolish are fascinated by it,
O rājā.
Lord of men, what you have suffered,
everyone suffers.

20 O respectworthy monarch
of the Bharata dynasty!
Only the very possessive man
grieves excessively
loss of kingdom, loss of friend,
loss of son.

21 A sensible man should treat
mahā-sorrow
with mahā-medicine.
Discipline the mind,
and cure the mammoth misery
of mental anguish.

22 Valour and wealth and friends
and relatives
cannot free you from sorrow
so excellently
as can a steady and patient
and disciplined mind.

23 O descendant of Bharata!
It is better to depend
more on character,
and less on friends.
Brahmā's three horses
are discipline, detachment, alertness.

24 The man who holds
these three reins of character
as he rides in his mind-chariot
transcends, O rājā,
the fear of death
and reaches the realm of Brahman.

25 O lord of the earth!
He who is such
that no one has reason
to fear him
attains the supreme deathless realm
of Viṣṇu.

26 The fruits of being such
an unfeared person
cannot be obtained
even by a thousand sacrifices
or by the practice
of continual fasting.

27 It goes without saying:
Nothing is more precious
than one's own ātman.
That is why,
O descendant of Bharata,
no one wants to die.

28 That is why compassion
should be shown
to all creatures.
Variously deluded,
trapped in the net
of their thoughts,

29 Unable to see clearly,
the wicked are doomed
to wander in this world
birth after birth. O rājā!
The clear-visioned attain
oneness with Brahman.

30 O mahā-wise monarch!
With that in mind,
perform the funeral rites
of all who have died,
and obtain the fruits
that accrue from this.

SECTION EIGHT

1 The excellent Kaurava listened to Vidura
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
but grief for his dead son
made him fall on the ground in a faint.

2 Seeing him lying semi-conscious
on the ground,
his relatives, Kṛṣṇā-Dvaipāyana-Vyāsa,
Kṣattā-Vidura,

3 Sañjaya, and his loyal doorkeepers
gathered round him,
sprinkled water on his face,
O Bharata Janamejaya,
soothed him
with palm-leaf fans,

4 And gently massaging
his inert body,
they tried
for a long time
to revive
Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

5 It was quite some time
before he returned
to his senses, and again
he began lamenting
the loss
of his sons.

6 "*Dhik*! Shame on man!"
he moaned.
"Shame on living
and breeding a family!
All it leads to is grief
again and again!

7 *Prabhu*! Lord! They perish –
sons and wealth
and family and friends –
and leave you
the fiery poison
of grief.

8 The body burns,
and the mind becomes mindless.
Unbearable the grief!
So unbearable,
death becomes dearer
than life!

9 Exactly such a calamity
is my misfortune today!
I have no choice.
Only by losing my life
can I escape
from my misery.

10 O finest of the twice-born!
I have decided –
I will not live any more."
With these words
to his mahātmā father,
Brahman-knowing Vyāsa,

11 Dhṛtarāṣṭra once again
plunged in a sea
of senseless sorrow,
succumbing to silence
over his slain sons,
O lord-of-the-world Janamejaya.

12 *Prabhu* Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana-Vyāsa
heard him say this,
and to his suffering son
grieving the loss
of his slain sons,
Vyāsa said:

13 "Mahā-muscled Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
Listen carefully to what I say.
You are a *prabhu*,
a lord learned in śruti,
discriminating, intelligent,
skilled in dharma-and-artha.

14 O destroyer of enemies!
Whatever deserves to be known,
you know.
You know only too well
how brief and fleeting
is the world of mortals.

15 O descendant of Bharata!
Unstable is creation,
nothing is eternal,
life ends in death.
Knowing this,
why do you grieve?

16 O Indra-among-rājās!
Making your son
the cause,
Cosmic Time Kāla
made all this
happen.

17 Since whatever happened
was inevitable, O king,
why do you grieve
for the heroes
who have attained
the supreme goal?

18 O master of men!
O mahā-muscled one!
Mahātmā Vidura knew this,
and he tried his best
to work out
a reconciliation.

19 It is my belief, though,
that no matter
how hard you try,
or how long,
you cannot prevent
what is fated to happen.

20 What the gods had decided,
I heard with my own ears.
In the hope that
it will steady your mind,
I will repeat
the word of the gods.

21 This was a long time ago.
Alert and untired,
I arrived once
at the sabhā of Indra,
and saw the gods discussing
among themselves.

22 Nārada was there too,
O blameless monarch,
along with other deva-ṛṣis.
O lord of the earth!
I noticed the Earth also
in their company.

23 For some reason or other
she happened
to be with them.
Mother Earth Dhātrī
said to the assembly
of gods:

24 'O mahā-fortune-favoured ones!
It is time now
for you to fulfil
what you promised me
once in the presence
of Brahmā.'

25 World-namaskāra-ed Viṣṇu
heard Earth
say this
to the assembled gods.
He smiled,
and said to her:

26 'Duryodhana, the eldest
of the hundred sons
of Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
will do what was promised
to you
by the gods,

27 In his role
as the *mahīpāla*
ruler of the earth.
For that to happen,
earth-lords will converge
on Kurukṣetra,

28 And slaughter each other
with fearful weapons.
Devī! Goddess!
In this way,
your heavy burden
will be reduced.

29 Lovely lady! Return now,
and accept the burden
you presently carry.'
O rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
To wipe out the world,
your son Duryodhana

30 Was born from Gāndhārī's womb,
as a portion of Kali.
O king!
He was revengeful,
wrathful, restless,
and scheming.

31 Fate decreed his brothers
to be like him.
Also Śakuni
his maternal uncle,
and his loved-and-loving
sakhā-friend Karṇa.

32 These kings were born
for the massive carnage
on earth.
As a rājā is,
so are his companions
and his followers.

33 If their master
is a man of dharma,
even followers of adharma
will turn to dharma.
The merits and defects of masters
reflect on their servants.

34 O mahā-muscled monarch!
Your sons followed
a wicked rājā,
and destroyed themselves.
Truth-knowing Nārada
knows what happened.

35 O lord of the earth!
Your sons' wickedness
is what destroyed them.
O Indra-among-rājās!
You have no reason to grieve.
Stop grieving.

36 O descendant of Bharata!
In no way
have the Pāṇḍavas harmed you.
Your wicked sons
are the ones who despoiled
the earth.

37 May fortune favour you!
Bhadraṁ te!
At the time
of the Rājasūya yajña,
Nārada insisted
on telling Yudhiṣṭhira:

38 'The Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas
will fight
and destroy each other.
That being so,
O son of Kuntī,
do what must be done.'

39 These words of Nārada,
O lord Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
greatly distressed the Pāṇḍavas.
I have revealed to you
the eternal secret
of the gods,

40 In the hope it will remove
your grief,
restore your *prāṇa*-life-breath,
and inspire affection for the Pāṇḍavas,
for what happened
was fated to happen.

41 O mahā-muscled monarch!
I heard this a long time ago,
and I repeated it
to Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
at the finest of all sacrifices,
the Rājasūya.

42 He listened to the secret,
and Dharma's son Yudhiṣṭhira
tried all he could
to prevent the Kaurava carnage,
but the decree of fate
is much too powerful.

43 Inviolable are the ways of fate,
O rājā.
There is no moving
or unmoving creature
who can escape
the decree of fate.

44 O descendant of Bharata!
You know all
about dharma,
excellent is your reasoning,
you know life's ins and outs –
why do you grieve?

45 If rājā Yudhiṣṭhira gets
to know
of your suffering,
he may well decide
to give up his own
prāṇa-life-breath.

46 O Indra-among-rājās!
He feels deeply
even for creatures
born in inferior yonis;
why will he not have compassion
for you?

47 So listen to me,
O descendant of Bharata!
Fate is irreversible.
Feel for the Pāṇḍavas.
Hold on
to your *prāṇa*-life-breath.

48 *Tāta*! My son!
If you do this,
your fame will spread,
dharma-and-artha flourish,
and long will you enjoy
the rewards of your tapasyā.

49 O mahā-fortune-favoured one!
Extinguish the fire
of the sorrow for the loss
of your sons
with the cool clear water
of reason."

50 O rājā Janamejaya!
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
Briefly Dhṛtarāṣṭra pondered
the words of illimitably
radiant Vyāsa.
Then he said:

51 "O incomparable twice-born!
I am trapped
in a net of mahā-sorrow.
I do not know
who I am.
I feel faint.

52 Since you say it is the will
of the gods,
I will try to hold on
to my life-breath,
I will try to overcome
my grief."

53 O Indra-among-rājās!
Assured by the words
of Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
Satyavatī's son
Vyāsa
suddenly vanished.

[XI:9:1-6]

Transcreated by P. Lal

SECTION NINE

1 "O twice-born ṛṣi!"
said Janamejaya.
"Tell me in detail
what ruler-of-the-earth
Dhṛtarāṣṭra did
after bhagavān Vyāsa left.

2 And tell me also
what the mahā-minded Kaurava rājā
Dharma's son Yudhiṣṭhira,
Kṛpa and the third – what they did.

3 Aśvatthāman's karma I know.
I also know
the mutual curses that were cast.
Tell me now
what happened next,
what Sañjaya said."

4 After the death of Duryodhana
and the destruction of his army
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
Sañjaya,
now without his inseeing wisdom,
went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

5 "Many lords of many lands,"
said Sañjaya,
"who fought side by side
with your sons,
have now departed
to the realms of their pitṛs.

6 O Bharata descendant!
Many tried
to work out a reconciliation,
but your adamant sons,
obsessed with war,
laid waste the world.

7 O ruler of the earth!
It is time now
to perform the funeral rites
of sons
and grandsons and fathers
and others."

8 Hearing these ominous words
of Sañjaya
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
ruler-of-the-earth Dhṛtarāṣṭra
once again
fell down in a faint.

9 Seeing the lord of the earth
slumped on the earth,
as if senseless,
wise-in-all-dharmas
Vidura
said to him:

10 "O rājā! Rise!
Why are you sleeping?
Do not grieve,
O bull-brave Bharata.
O lord of the world,
the final end is for all.

11 O descendant of Bharata!
Not there,
then there,
then again not there –
that's all there is.
Why do you grieve then?

12 Your grief
will not bring back
the dead.
Nor, because of it,
will you die.
So why all this grief?

13 Noṇ-combatant dies,
maharāja,
and combatant survives.
Cosmic Time Kāla
is the killer,
and victims all of us.

14 O incomparable Kaurava!
Kāla is a collector
of every conceivable creature.
The truth is:
Kāla loves none,
hates none.

15 O bull-brave Bharata!
Like straws in the wind,
appearing and disappearing,
creatures in Kāla
come
and go.

16 We come crowding,
so many of us –
and then we fade away.
When Kāla calls,
we obey. We must.
Why grieve over this?

17 The warriors who perished
on the field
are mahātmā heroes
whose reward is heaven.
They deserve nobler feelings
than grief.

18 The heaven that is attained
by brave warriors
who sacrifice their lives
cannot be attained
by yajñas, tapasyā
and knowledge.

19 These heroes were strict-vowed
and learned in the Vedas.
They perished
facing their foes.
Is this any reason
to grieve?

20 On the yajña-fire bodies
of their enemies
they poured their arrow libations,
and on the yajña-fire
of their own bodies received
arrow-libations in return.

21 This is the road, O rājā,
that leads
to the supreme heaven
reserved only
for Kṣatriyas
who perish in battle.

22 They shone on the field,
these mahātmas,
these brave Kṣatriya heroes.
They have found
the supreme fulfilment.
Do not grieve.

23 O bull-brave hero!
Calm your ātman
with your ātman,
and do not grieve.
Or grief
will overpower you,
and you will forget
to do your duty
that needs to be done
most urgently now.

[XI:10:1-6]

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SECTION TEN

1 After listening to the words
of Vidura,
bull-brave Dhṛtarāṣṭra
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
ordered his chariot to be yoked,
and said:

2 "Go quickly and ask Gāndhārī
to come here
with the other Bharata ladies,
as well as Kuntī
and other ladies
of the palace."

3 Saying this to wise-in-dharma
Vidura, mahātmā Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
his mind still debilitated by grief,
climbed into his chariot.

4 Still mourning the loss
of her sons,
Gāndhārī,
advised by her husband,
came with Kuntī and other ladies
before rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

5 In front of the rājā,
the ladies clasped
each other fervently
and burst
into loud lamentations
of tear-filled grief.

6 Afflicted with grief profounder
even than theirs,
Vidura offered them consolation.
Tears choked their voices
as he guided them
outside the capital.

7 All the Kaurava homes
resounded
with wailing and lamentation.
The whole capital,
with all its young and old,
was a city of woe.

8 And the ladies
whom even the gods
never got a chance to see
were now
the cynosure
of the humblest citizens.

9 Untying their lovely tresses,
discarding all
their glittering ornaments,
each in a single dress,
they streamed out of the city
like orphans.

10 Like dappled deer streaming
from mountain caves
after the death of their leader,
the ladies streamed
from their white-painted
mountain-like homes.

11 Huddled in *āṅgana*-courtyards
and city squares,
the grief-gripped groups
of young girls,
O rājā,
looked like herds of calves.

12 It was a scene resembling
the doom of the worlds
at the end of a yuga –
these young girls
clutching each other
and wailing for sons, brothers and fathers.

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13 Bewildered by grief,
bereft of reason,
they wept and moaned
and moved about aimlessly.
Dazed, they did not know
what needed to be done.

14 The same girls who were so shy
it embarrassed them
to play with their loved-and-loving
sakhī-friends,
stood shamelessly in a single dress
before their mothers-in-law.

15 The very same girls who,
for the smallest hurt,
ran to friends for relief
and consolation,
now avoided even looking
at each other.

16 Surrounded by thousands
of weeping women,
perturbed rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
drove out
of the capital
to the field of battle.

17 Following in the trail
of the lord of the earth
were artisans, traders,
and Vaiśyas
and professionals
of all kinds.

18 What a wailing it was!
The three worlds
trembled with the mahā-agony
of the women mourning
the loss of their men
in the Kaurava carnage.

19 It was like the day of doom
at the end of a yuga
when all created life
is incinerated.
Everyone felt the day of doom
had arrived.

20 Mahārāja!
Devoted followers
of the Kaurava dynasty,
anguished
by the extermination
of the Kauravas,
broke into peals
of loud lamentation.

SECTION ELEVEN

1 A *krośa* away (continued Vaiśampāyana)
they saw the three mahā-chariot-heroes:
Śaradvat's son Kṛpa,
Drauṇi-Aśvatthāman, and Kṛtavarman.

2 Seeing the glorious, lordly,
blind but wisdom-inseeing rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
their eyes brimmed with throat-choking tears,
and they said to him:

3 "O ruler of the earth!
O rājā! Mahārāja!
Performing difficult feats,
your son and his followers
have attained the heaven
of Śakra-Indra.

4 O bull-brave Bharata!
Only we three
chariot-heroes of the army
have survived.
The rest of your army
has been wiped out."

[XI:11:5-10]

Transcreated by P. Lal

5 After this news was given
to rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
Śāradvat-Kṛpa
said to Gāndhārī,
still grieving the loss
of her sons:

6 "All your sons were fearless
in their battle
against heavy odds.
Heroic were their deeds.
They have now attained
the supreme abode.

7 Obtaining the pure realm
with the strength
of their weapons,
adorned with radiant bodies,
they live there happily now,
like gods.

8 Not one of them
showed his back
to his enemy on the field.
Not one folded
his palms in *añjali.*
All were killed by weapons.

9 It is said in the Purāṇas
that Kṣatriyas
killed by weapons
attain the supreme fulfilment.
You should not grieve
for them.

10 Nor have the Pāṇḍavas
been spared, O rānī.
Listen to what
we did,
with Aśvatthāman
as our leader.

11 When we learnt that Bhīma
had killed your son
by means of adharma,
we entered their tents
and slew
the sleeping Pāṇḍavas.

12 Drupada's son Dhṛṣṭadyumna
we killed
along with the Pāñcālas;
we also killed
all five sons
of Draupadī.

13 We have killed in battle
the enemies of your son.
All three of us
are fugitives now.
We cannot stay here
with you,

14 Because the mahā-bowmen
infuriated Pāṇḍavas
are out for revenge,
and very soon
they will be here,
searching for us.

15 O illustrious lady!
As soon as they heard
of the deaths of their sons,
the ever-alert
bull-brave Pāṇḍavas
picked up our trail.

16 We have killed their sons
and relatives.
We dare not stay here
any longer.
O rānī! Do not grieve
any more.

17 O rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
Give us leave to go.
Practise supreme forbearance.
Keep Kṣatriya dharma
in mind –
and nothing else."

18 O descendant of Bharata!
With these words,
Kṛpa, Kṛtavarman
and Droṇa's son Aśvatthāman
half-circled the rājā
in respectful *pradakṣiṇa*,

19 And gazing lingeringly
at rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
a deeply learned mahārāja,
they rode off
on swift horses
to the banks of the Gaṅgā.

20 There, burdened with anxiety,
the three mahā-chariot heroes
parted company,
O rājā Janamejaya,
each choosing to go
a different way.

21 Śāradvat-Kṛpa went
to his Hastināpura,
Hārdikya-Kṛtavarman went
to his kingdom,
Drauṇi-Aśvatthāman went
to Vyāsa's ashram.

22 Afflicted with fear after harming
the mahātmā Pāṇḍavas,
the three heroes kept looking
at each other
as they rode off
in different directions.

23 Having met rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
all three
foe-crushing mahātmā heroes
rode off
in different directions
before dawn broke.

24 It was after this, O rājā,
the Pāṇḍava
mahā-chariot-heroes
intercepted Droṇa's son
Aśvatthāman
and defeated him in battle.

SECTION TWELVE

1 And so it was
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
after the slaughter
of all the armies,
when Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
got news
that his aged father
Dhṛtarāṣṭra had left
the Elephant City
Hastināpura

2 That he, grieving for his sons,
O mahārāja Janamejaya,
decided to go with his brothers
to the field of battle
and meet Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
who was grieving for *his* sons.

3 Accompanying him were
heroic mahātmā Krishna
of the Dāśārha,
and Yuyudhana
also known as Sātyaki,
and Yuyutsu.

4 Following them,
choking with grief,
enfeebled by sorrow,
came Draupadī
and a host
of Pāñcāla ladies.

5 O incomparable Bharata!
Yudhiṣṭhira saw,
on the banks of the Gaṅgā,
flocks of women
piteously crying
like *kurarī*-ospreys.

6 Raising their arms, they wailed
and they moaned,
thousands of them,
surrounding Yudhiṣṭhira,
saying sweet words
and bitter words.

7 "You have killed fathers,
brothers, gurus,
sons and friends.
O wise-in-dharma Yudhiṣṭhira,
what happened
to your compassion?

8 O mahā-muscled hero!
How did you feel
after killing Droṇa,
Pitāmaha Bhīṣma,
and Jayadratha?
Tell us.

9 O Bharata descendant!
What good
is this kingdom to you
without fathers, brothers without,
valiant Abhimanyu,
and Draupadī's sons?"

10 Ignoving the women wailing
like *kurari*-ospreys,
Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira,
the mahā-muscled hero,
hurried to respectfully greet
his elder father Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

11 The other Pāṇḍavas also,
abiding by dharma,
enemy-exterminators all of them,
respectfully greeted their father,
each announcing
his name.

12 Burning with grief over the deaths
of his sons,
patriarch Dhṛtarāṣṭra clasped
the killer of his sons,
Pāṇḍava Yudhiṣṭhira,
in a loveless embrace.

13 O descendant of Bharata!
Even as he spoke
consolingly to Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira,
wicked-ātmaned Dhṛtarāṣṭra
was like a blazing fire
eager to consume Bhīma.

14 Anger was the fire.
Grief the fanning wind.
Bhīma was the forest
waiting
to be consumed
by the raging flames.

15 Guessing his evil intention,
Hari-Krishna
elbowed Bhīma aside,
and with both hands lifted
an iron statue of Bhīma
and placed it before him.

16 Mahā-intelligent Hari-Krishna
knew from before
this would happen,
and had prepared
in advance to meet
this eventuality.

17 Powerful rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
embraced tightly
with both arms the iron likeness
of wolf-waisted
Vṛkodara-Bhīma,
and crushed it.

18 Ten-thousand-elephant-strong
rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
crushed the statue.
Blood streaked his chest,
blood gushed
from his mouth.

19 Smeared with blood,
he collapsed,
like a red-blossoming
pārijāta-tree
uprooted toppling
on the earth.

20 It was his *sūta*-advisor
Gāvalgaṇa-Sañjaya
who rushed forward
and broke his fall,
and calmed him, saying,
"You must not do this."

21 Then his rage left him,
and the mahātmā monarch,
moaning "Hai Bhīma!
Hai Bhīma!"
broke down,
weeping profusely.

22 Seeing his rage fading,
and he grieving
that he had crushed Bhīma,
Vāsudeva-Krishna,
finest among men,
said to him:

23 "Radiant lord Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
Do not grieve.
You have not killed Bhīma.
What you crushed
was only
an iron statue.

24 O bull-brave Bharata!
Seeing you
inflamed with wrath,
I pushed
Kuntī's son away
from the jaws of death.

25 O tiger-strong rājā!
There is no one
as strong as you.
O mahā-muscled one!
Who can escape the grip
of your arms?

26 Who can escape
from the presence
of Antaka-Yama?
Who can survive
the strength
of your embrace?

27 O king of the Kauravas!
Sorrow for your sons
has blinded you to dharma.
That is why
you were bent
on killing Bhīma.

28 O Indra-among-rājās!
That is why
I substituted the iron statue
of Bhīma
which your son Duryodhana
had once commissioned.

29 It is absolutely wrong for you,
O rājā,
to want to kill Vṛkodara-Bhīma.
Your sons, mahārāja,
are dead – you cannot bring them
back to life.

30 Stop plunging
your mind
in senseless grief!
We are trying
to work out
a sensible peace.
Help us
to achieve this."

SECTION THIRTEEN

1 Servants and attendants came
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
and cleaned and bathed
Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
Then, Madhusūdana-Krishna
said to him:

2 "You have studied the Vedas,
O rājā,
the different śāstra-scriptures,
the Purāṇas,
and you are learned
in rāja-dharma.

3 Learned, mahā-wise, unperturbed
by strength and weakness –
why this anger, then,
when the fault is all yours?

4 O descendant of Bharata!
Did I not warn you?
Did not Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Vidura
and Sañjaya warn you?
You did not listen
to any one of us, O rājā.

5 O Kaurava king!
How hard we tried!
You knew how strong and brave
the Pāṇḍavas were –
yet you refused
to listen.

6 Only that rājā whose mind
is wisely stable,
who knows when and where
to do what,
who can see his own faults –
only he prospers.

7 He who repeatedly rejects
harmful or beneficial words
of well-meant advice
does injustice to himself,
and lives to suffer
the inevitable calamity.

8 O Bharata descendant!
Look at yourself.
You flouted justice, O rājā.
You suppressed your ātman.
You succumbed to the spell
of Duryodhana.

9 After ruining yourself by yourself,
why do you want
to ruin Bhīma?
Control your anger.
Think of how wicked
your plan is.

10 Because mean-minded Duryodhana
insulted Pāñcālī-Draupadī
in the sabhā,
Bhīma wanted
to take revenge,
and killed him.

11 Look at yourself
and at your wicked-ātmaned son!
The atrocity you committed!
And think –
for no fault of theirs
you exiled the Pāṇḍavas!"

12 O ruler of men!
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
Krishna spoke these straight truths
to lord-of-the-earth
Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
who replied to Devakī's son:

13 "O mahā-muscled one!
Mādhava-Krishna!
What you say is right.
Affection for one's son
is very strong.
Over-fondness made me unstable.

14 How fortunate I am
that you intervened and saved
tiger-brave, truly valiant,
powerful Bhīma
from my fatal embrace
just in time.

15 O Mādhava-Krishna!
I am sane now –
anger, fever, anxiety gone.
O Keśava-Krishna!
I want to caress
Pāṇḍu's second son Arjuna.

16 All the earth-lords are dead.
My own sons are dead.
For love and help,
I have none
to turn to
except Pāṇḍu's son."

17 With tears in his eyes,
Dhṛtarāṣṭra embraced
handsome-bodied Bhīma,
Dhanañjaya-Arjuna,
and Mādrī's twin sons,
both brilliant warriors,
and he comforted
and blessed them, saying,
"May you all prosper."

SECTION FOURTEEN

1 Taking 's Dhṛtarāṣṭra's permission
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
the Pāṇḍavas of the Kaurava lineage,
accompanied
by Keśava-Krishna,
went to meet Gāndhārī.

2 When grieving-for-her-sons
blameless Gāndhārī was told
foe-killing Yudhiṣṭhira wished to meet her,
she decided to curse him.

3 That Gāndhārī had evil intentions
towards the Pāṇḍavas –
this fact
was already known
to Satyavatī's son,
ṛṣi Vyāsa.

4 That supreme able-to-trawel-
everywhere-with-mind-speed ṛṣi
touched the pure, fragrant water
of the Gaṅgā
and, having purified himself,
arrived where they were.

5 With spiritual insight
and single minded will-power,
he was able
to enter
into the innermost thoughts
of all creatures.

6 Welfare-wishing Vyāsa
of mahā-tapasyā
faced his daughter-in-law
and, transforming curse-kāla
into reconciliation-kāla,
he said to her:

7 "Calm yourself, Gāndhārī!
Give up your anger
against the Pāṇḍavas.
Do not say
what you want to say.
Just listen to me.

8 For the last eighteen days
your son Duryodhana,
desiring victory, came to you,
saying, 'Mother, bless me.
I go to kill my enemies.
May victory be mine.'

9 Time after time, hoping for victory,
he came to you.
Time after time, Gāndhārī,
you said to him:
'*Yato dharmastato jayaḥ*:
Victory is where dharma is.'

10 I do not recall, Gāndhārī,
you ever speaking
an untruth at any time.
Whatever you say
is aimed at the welfare
of all creatures.

11 The Pāṇḍavas have crossed
the gruesome carnage
of the war of the rājās,
and proved beyond doubt
the truth of the saying:
'Nothing excels dharma.'

12 O wise-in-dharma lady!
You were always patient,
always forebearing.
Why not now?
Give up adharma. Remember:
'Victory is where dharma is.'

13 Noble-minded Gāndhārī!
Think of your dharma.
Remember what you said.
Curb your anger.
Truth-speaking lady!
Don't do this."

14 "*Bhagavan*! Revered one!"
replied Gāndhārī.
"I don't hate the Pāṇḍavas.
I don't want them dead.
But grief for my sons
has unhinged my mind.

15 I should cherish Kuntī's sons
the way Kuntī
cherishes them.
Dhṛtarāṣṭra should cherish
the Pāṇḍavas
the way you cherish them.

16 The misdeeds of Duryodhana,
Subala's son Śakuni,
Karṇa and Duḥśāsana
are responsible
for the slaughter
of the Kauravas.

17 It is not the fault
of dreadful-deed-doer
Bībhatsu-Arjuna,
wolf-waisted Vṛkodara-Bhīma,
Nakula and Sahadeva,
and Yudhiṣṭhira.

18 The Kauravas quarrelled
among themselves,
fought and killed each other,
and others as well.
That is not
what is hurtful to me.

19 But that mahā-minded Bhīma,
in the presence
of Vāsudeva-Krishna,
challenged Duryodhana
to face him
in mace-combat,

20 And finding that my son,
with expert footwork and mace-skill,
excelled him,
struck him below his navel –
that is what
inflamed my anger.

21 How can a brave warrior,
just to save himself,
conveniently transgress in a duel
the dharma of mace-combat
laid down
by mahātmā dharma-knowers?"

SECTION FIFTEEN

1 Gāndhārī's words frightened Bhīma
(continued Vaiśampāyana);
humbly he approached her,
and said in reply:

2 "Dharma or adharma,
I did what I did
in self-defence, to save myself.
You must excuse me.

3 No one could defeat
your mahā-powerful son
by sticking to dharma.
That is why
I did what I
should not have done.

4 It was he who first used adharma
against Yudhiṣṭhira.
He was always deceitful.
That is why
I did what I
should not have done.

5 To prevent
a lone and valiant survivor
to regain the Kaurava kingdom
by killing me
in mace combat,
I did what I did.

6 You know what he did,
your own son,
to the Pāñcāla princess
Draupadī,
in her period,
in a single dress.

7 Without getting rid
of Suyodhana-Duryodhana,
we could never enjoy
this sea-girt earth –
so I did
what I did.

8 In the middle of the sabhā,
your son bared
his left thigh
before Draupadī.
What could be more disgusting
to us than this?

9 We should have finished off
your wicked son
then and there.
But Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
stopped us –
and we lost the chance.

10 What a fierce fire of mahā-hatred
your son fanned
against us! – sending us
to forest-exile, O rānī!
So I did
what I did.

11 By killing Duryodhana in battle,
we are freed at last
from that hate.
Yudhiṣṭhira has the kingdom,
and our self-respect
is redeemed."

12 “Tāta! Dear Bhīma!” said Gāndhārī.
“Such praise for my son!
You make him seem deathless.
You are right –
He did do all
that you say he did.

13 O descendant of Bharata!
When Vṛṣasena
killed Nakula’s chariot-horses,
you ripped open
the chest of Duḥśāsana
and drank his blood –

14 A barbaric deed,
condemned by civilised people
as un-āryan.
Wolf-waisted Vṛkodara-Bhīma!
That was exactly
what you did.”

15 “No one should drink the blood
of another,” said Bhīma,
“let alone one’s own.
A brother’s blood
is one’s own blood.
There is no difference.

16 Mother, do not grieve.
I did not drink his blood.
I wet my teeth and lips –
that’s all. Vaivasvata-Yama,
god of death, knows I smeared
only my hands with it.

17 Duḥśāsana’s brothers
were so overjoyed
when Vṛṣasena slew Nakula’s horses
that I planned
to terrify them
by doing what I did.

[X:15:18-23]

Transcreated by P. Lal

18 Never once did I forget
the angry promise
I made to Draupadī
when she was dragged
by her hair in the sabhā
during the dice-game.

19 Had I broken my word,
O rānī,
Kṣatriya-dharma would forever
have been sullied,
so I had to do
what I did.

20 O Gāndhārī! Do not accuse me.
Whn we innocents
were victimised by your sons,
you kept silent.
Why are you so determined
to condemn me now?"

21 "You are an invincible hero,"
Gāndhārī said.
"You killed one hundred sons
of an old man.
Could you not spare just one,
one of the least quality?

22 Very old are we,
tāta, dear child.
Our kingdom
has been taken from us.
Could not one stick have been spared
for a frail blind couple?

23 *Tāta*, dear child!
O Antaka-Yama of my sons!
Could you not have cherished
dharma a little,
and left me one son, just one,
to assuage my grief?"

24 Mourning her sons and grandsons
(Vaiśampāyana continued),
Gāndhārī suddenly
burst out
in a fit of anger:
"Where is rājā Yudhiṣṭhira?"

25 Trembling with fear,
palms folded in *añjali*,
Indra-among-rājās Yudhiṣṭhira
gingerly approached Gāndhārī,
and said sweetly
to her:

26 "Devī! Here I am, Yudhiṣṭhira,
cruel killer of your sons,
cruel killer of all
the earth-lords.
I deserve to be cursed.
Curse me.

27 I don't want to live,
I don't want kingdom,
I don't want wealth,
by killing my friends.
I am a fool.
I have killed my kinsmen."

28 Gāndhārī heard the confession
of fear-stricken Yudhiṣṭhira,
standing
before her.
She did not say a word.
She started sobbing.

29 Yudhiṣṭhira bent low
to touch her feet.
Before the king
could do this,
wise-in-dharma
and gifted-with-foresight

[XI:15:30-35]

Transcreated by P. Lal

30 Gāndhārī devī peered
from below the fold
of her eye-band,
and the beautiful
toe-nails of the king
instantly became black.

31 Seeing this, Arjuna ran behind
Vāsudeva-Krishna,
trying to hide himself.
O descendant of Bharata!
Noticing Arjuna
scurrying for safety,

32 Gāndhārī, angry no more,
spoke to them
as would a mother.
Taking her permission,
they went
to the mother of heroes

33 Pṛthā-Kuntī,
all of then together,
the broad-chested Pāṇḍava brothers.
Seeing her sons
after so long a time,
she remembered their hardships,

34 And covering her face
with the end of her dress,
Kuntī devi burst into tears.
Mother and sons
wept together;
then Pṛthā-Kuntī

35 Kept staring at the bodies
of her sons,
scarred with battle-wounds.
Caressing the bodies
of her sons
again and again,

36 Still sorrowing Kuntī
expressed her grief for Daupadī
who had lost all her sons.
Then she saw
Draupadī lying on the ground,
at a little distance.

37 "Ārye! O dignified lady!"
said Draupadī.
"Where have they all gone,
Abhimanyu and other grandsons?
Why are they not with you today,
O lady of tapasyā?

38 What use is a kingdom to me
without my sons?"
Large-and-lovely-eyed
Pṛthā-Kuntī
tried her best
to console

39 Weeping Yājñasenī-Draupadī
after helping her to stand up.
O king!
Then, accompanied
by her sons,
Pṛthā-Kuntī

40 Went to Gāndhārī,
who was still
burdened with grief.
Seeing illustrious Kuntī
with Draupadī,
Gāndhārī said:

41 "Don't give in to grief,
my child. See –
I am grief-stricken too.
Cosmic Time Kāla
is the cause
of this world-destroying carnage,

42 This horripilating horror.
What happened,
had to happen.
The mahā-warning
has cme true –
that Vidura gave,

43 Mahā-minded Vidura,
when Krishna's efforts
at peace-making failed.
Since this calamity
was inevitable,
specially now since it is over,

44 What good is grieving?
All dead. Grief is useless.
You and I are the same –
victims of grief, rejected by all.
I am responsible
for the slaughter of my family."

SECTION SIXTEEN

1 She said this (continued Vaiśampāyana),
and from where she stood,
with her super-sensuous sight,
Gāndhārī
surveyed the battlefield
of Kaurava doom.

2 A husband-devoted lady,
mahā-fortune-favoured,
serene in vow-adherence,
dedicated to the practice
of severe tapasyā,
and truth-speaking,

3 Blessed with spiritual insight
by mahā-ṛṣi Kṛṣṇa-Vyāsa of virtuous karma,
she surveyed the scene,
and broke into lamentation.

4 Profoundly percipient Gāndhārī
saw the wondrous
horripilating field of battle
from far,
but it appeared to her
as very near.

5 Bones and hair and marrow
everywhere,
streams of blood
everywhere,
thousands of corpses scattered
everywhere.

6 Blood of elephant-riders,
horsemen, foot-soldiers
everywhere . . .
Headless bodies
and bodiless heads
everywhere.

7 A cacophony of cries
of elephants, horses,
men and women;
jackals, cranes, ravens,
kaṅka-birds and crows
everywhere.

8 Man-eating rākṣasas
kurara-ospreys
inauspicious jackals
howling
vultures
perched everywhere.

9 With Vyāsa's permission,
lord-of-the-earth
Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
and the sons of Pāṇḍu
led by Yudhiṣṭhira,
proceeded to the field.

10 The Kaurava ladies too went
to the field of battle,
led by Vāsudeva-Krishna
and lord-of-the-earth
Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
bereaved of his family.

11 At Kurukṣetra,
the lord-less ladies
saw the field
littered with the corpses
of husbands, fathers,
sons and brothers,

12 And saw the bodies
nibbled and devoured
by crows, jackals, vultures,
bhūtas, piśācas,
rākṣasas and other
night-roaming creatures.

13 Lamenting profusely,
the ladies alighted
from their expensive chariots
near the field
that looked like the playground
of Rudra-Śiva.

14 Never had the Bharata ladies
seen a spectacle so horrific.
Some collapsed
on the corpses,
others rolled
on the ground.

15 A heart-rending sight –
all the Pāñcāla
and Kaurava ladies,
unhusbanded,
faint with fatigue,
assailed with senselessness.

16 Their eerie, piteous wails
filled the field
of Kurukṣetra.
Moved by this,
Subala's daughter,
wise-in-dharma Gāndhārī

17 Summoned before her
lotus-petal-eyed
finest-of-men
Puruṣottama Krishna
and said to him
compassionately:

18 "Lotus-petal-eyed
Mādhava-Krishna!
Have the heart to look
at my widowed, dishevelled
daughters-in-law,
wailing like *kurarī*-ospreys.

19 Near the corpses
of their bull-brave husbands,
they remember their virtues;
they run to be near
their husbands, brothers,
fathers and sons.

20 There are swarms of them
on the field –
mothers of heroes
moaning,
wives of husbands moaning,
sisters moaning.

21 Look at this field,
glowing with the glory
of fire-radiant heroes –
tiger-among-men Bhīṣma,
Karṇa, Abhimanyu, Droṇa,
Drupada, Śalya and others.

22 Look at this field,
radiant with the dazzle
of mahātmā warriors' ornaments:
body armour, *niṣka* gold chains,
aṅgada-armlets, *keyūra*-bracelets,
and glittering gems.

23 And strewn everywhere
on the field,
the warriors' weapons –
śakti-spears,
parigha-clubs, shining swords
and sharp arrows.

24 In one part, flesh-eating creatures
exulting and feasting on corpses;
in another,
jumping and playing;
in still another,
restfully sprawling.

25 *Vibho*! *Vīra*! Radiant hero!
Janārdana-Krishna!
Crusher-of-mortals Krishna!
Look at this field of horrors!
It makes me sick
with grief.

26 Madhusūdana-Krishna!
O slayer of Madhu!
Not only are the Pāñcālas
and Kauravas exterminated –
it seems to me the five elements
have been annihilated.

27 Devouring *garuḍa*-birds
and vultures
are dragging the blood-drenched corpses,
and thousands
of carrion-consumers are pecking
at mutilated flesh.

28 Who could have imagined
this war would end the lives
of such heroes
as Jayadratha,
Karṇa, Droṇa, Bhīṣma
and Abhimanyu?

29 The unkillable were killed –
made senseles and killed.
Vultures, *kaṅkas,*
ravens, hawks,
dogs and jackals are having
a fine feast!

30 Look at them –
all those tigers-among-men,
driven by revenge
on orders from Duryodhana,
inert on the field
like spent-out fires,

31 The beds they slept on
were the softest,
the most luxurious.
They lie
sprawled now
on the naked earth.

32 Professional bards sang
their praises,
delighting them.
Now they listen
to the inauspicious howling
of jackals.

33 They are rolling in dust,
the illustrious heroes
who smeared their bodies
with sandalpaste and *aguru*-scent,
and relaxed
on comfortable beds.

34 Fearfully screaming vultures
and wolves and ravens
are tugging
at their ornaments
and scattering them
all over the field.

35 But they try to hold on
to their sharp arrows
and swords
and glittering maces –
all these lifeless.
war-proud heroes.

36 Handsome warriors,
brave as bulls,
wearing dark-green necklaces,
so many of them
supine on the field,
devoured by carnivores.

37 Look at that warrior there,
with mascular arms
as handsome as a *parigha*-club,
clutching his mace
to his chest
like a beloved wife.

38 O Janārdana-Krishna!
So dazzling-bright
are the weapons and armour
of some warriors
that beasts of prey pass them by,
thinking they are alive.

39 But other mahātmā warriors
are mauled
and mutilated and dragged,
and their shining
gold garlands litter
the battlefield.

40 Thousands of fierce wolves
are scouring
the battlefield,
tugging at the necklaces
that adorn the necks
of the illustrious warriors.

41 The same warriors
who used to wake,
early at dawn,
to the sweet strains
of eulogies chanted
by professional bards,

42 Now, O brave-as-a-tiger
Vṛṣṇi-Krishna,
are surrounded
by grief-stricken,
bereaved,
lovely-limbed ladies.

43 O Keśava-Krishna!
The fading lustre
on the faces
of these lovely ladies
resembles the soft glow
of pink lotuses.

44 And then they stop weeping,
and go in search
of their near and dear ones;
and then they find them,
and then they start
weeping afresh.

45 With so much lamentation
and so much grief,
the glowing-like-gold
and shining-like-the-sun faces
of the Kaurava ladies
are bright like burnished copper.

[XI:16:46-51]

Transcreated by P. Lal

46 O Keśava-Krishna!
Look at the lot of them –
the *śyāma*-skinned,
gauri-complexioned,
single-dress-wearing
wives of Duryodhana.

47 What a confused clamour
of wailing
and moaning!
The other ladies
cannot make out
what they say.

48 Breathing heavy sighs,
moaning loud and long,
giving vent to their agony
for their slain men,
all they want now
is to end their life.

49 They see the corpses
of their husbands
and scream their grief,
and with delicate hands
they beat their heads
again and again.

50 Heaps of sliced heads
and arms
and other limbs!
Piled one atop the other,
the field
completely covered.

51 They see so many
headless bodeis
and bodiless heads,
and they go berserk
with grief,
and collapse senseless.

52 They fit one head
on a trunk,
and it does not fit,
and then they wail,
'No, it is not he,
it is not his.'

53 But they keep trying,
these helpless women,
matching arms and thighs and feet,
and failing,
they collapse senseless
on the field.

54 So many corpses with no heads,
so many heads
unrecognisably disfigured
by devouring beasts –
the Bharata ladies
do not know who is whose.

55 O Madhusūdana-Krishna!
Look at them –
so many of them
beating their heads with fists,
seeing brothers, fathers, sons and husbands
killed by enemies.

56 Impossible to walk on this field
littered with arms
clutching swords,
and countless ear-ringed heads –
a field slippery with mix
of marrow and blood.

57 Never a drop of grief
for these blameless women –
and now they are drowning
in a sea of sorrow
of slain husbands and sons
and fathers!

58 O Janārdana-Krishna!
Look at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's
lovely-haired daughters-in-law
huddled in groups
on the field,
like herds of calves.

59 O Keśava-Krishna!
Can there be
greater grief for me than this –
to see all
my daughters-in-law here
lamenting like this?

60 What terrible crime did I commit
in my past life,
O Mādhava-Krishna,
that I should see
the slaughter of my sons,
grandsons and brothers?"

61 Agonising Gāndhārī
had barely finished
lamenting before
Janārdana-Krishna,
weeping over
her slain son,
when her eyes fell
on the body
of her son
Duryodhana.

SECTION SEVENTEEN

1 Crushed by grief seeing Duryodhana dead
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
Gāndhārī suddenly reeled and fell
like a plantain tree cut down.

2 Slowly recovering her senses,
she stared at the blood-drenched body
of Duryodhana,
and moaned again and again.

3 Grief clouded all her senses.
She wept softly.
Embracing Duryodhana,
she kept repeating:
"Hai! My son!
Hai! My son!"

4 Her fire-hot tears fell
on the *niṣka*-gold necklace
on the muscular neck
of her broad-shouldered son,
and trickled down
his chest.

5 To Hṛṣīkeśa-Krishna standing
beside her,
she said: "Radiant lord!
On the eve
of the battle that massacred
our family,

6 Finest-of-kings Duryodhana
came to me,
O Vārṣṇeya-Krishna, and said,
palms joined in *añjali*:
'Wish me victory, mother,
in this family war.'

7 O tiger-among-men Krishna!
He said this,
and I foresaw the calamity,
and I told him:
'Victory is
where dharma is.

8 *Prabhu*! My lord-like son!
If you don't do
what should not be done
on a battlefield,
your weapons will bring you
a god-like victory.'

9 *Prabhu*! O lord Krishna!
That is what I said –
so I do not grieve for him.
I grieve for helpless Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
who has lost all
his friends and relatives.

10 But do look at my son,
O Mādhava-Krishna,
my wrath-possessed son,
finest of warriors,
skilled in weapons,
sleeping on a hero's bed.

11 Look at the whimsical ways
of Cosmic Time Kāla! –
Foe-exterminating Duryodhana,
behind whom walked
powerful crowned kings,
now rolling in the dust!

12 He has surely attained
the hero's fulfilment
that is so difficult to attain,
for he lies facing
the field of battle,
as a hero should.

13 There was a time
when lovely girls sat
around him, pleasuring him.
Now he lies dead
on the naked earth,
surrounded by she-jackals.

14 There was a time
when kings sat around him
and flattered him.
Now he lies dead
on the naked earth,
pecked at by vultures.

15 There was a time
when young girls soothed him
with waving fans.
Now birds surround him,
fanning him
with their flapping wings.

16 Felled by Bhīma,
mahā-muscled,
truly valiant,
brave-as-a-lion Duryodhana
lies on the field
like a fallen elephant.

17 See, Krishna –
there he lies,
Duryodhana,
bloodied in battle
by the fatal mace
of Bhīma.

18 O Keśava-Krishna!
See the mahā-muscled
leader of eleven *akṣauhiṇīs*,
bloodied in battle unfairly,
unfairly
killed in battle.

19 Like a tiger
killed by a lion,
mahā-powerful
mahā-bowman Duryodhana
lies there,
butchered by Bhīma.

20 A fool!
A fate-felled fool!
He ignored Vidura,
he refused his father,
he mocked his elders –
and Kāla killed him.

21 For thirteen years
my son ruled
this foe-free earth;
now the lord of the earth
is become
a part of the earth.

22 O Vārṣṇeya-Krishna!
Not so long ago,
I saw my son
lord of elephants and cows
and horses – all over,
all ended.

23 O Mādhava-Krishna!
O mahā-muscled one!
Without elephants, cows and horses,
this earth is now another's.
I do not want
to live in it any more.

24 Can't you see?
Greater than the pain
of my son's death
is the pain of these widows
grieving by the side
of their slain husbands.

25 Krishna, look! There –
Lakṣmaṇa's mother,
lovely-haired, graceful-hipped,
radiantly beautiful like a *vedī*-altar,
loosening her hair
in Duryodhana's arms –

26 The same handsome arms
which enfolded her
when Duryodhana was alive,
and which gave
the noble-minded beauty
the pleasures of love.

27 Why does my heart
not shatter
into a hundred pieces,
seeing my son
and his father
both dead?

28 She sees her son inert,
and Lakṣmaṇa's blameless mother
smells his bloodied head,
the lovely-thighed lady,
and lovingly runs her hands
on Duryodhana's body.

29 Who is she mourning,
this noble-minded lady –
husband or son?
No one can tell
by looking at her.
She looks at her son,

30 O Mādhava-Krishna,
the large-eyed mother,
and beats her head with both hands;
she looks at her husband,
the Kaurava rājā,
and buries her head in his chest.

31 Lady of tapasyā,
as lovely as the inner heart of a lotus,
she glows like a lotus,
my daughter-in-law,
as she weeps in turn the fate of her husband
and the fate of her son.

32 If there is any truth at all
in the *āgama*-Vedas
and in the *śruti*-revelations,
king Duryodhana
has attained the eternal realms
by the strength of his arms."

SECTION EIGHTEEN

1 "See, Mādhava-Krishna,"
continued Gāndhārī,
"my one hundred sons,
my never-tiring sons,
slaughtered by Bhīma's mace
on the battlefield.

2 My deepest sorrow is this –
to see my daughters-in-law,
hair dishevelled, sons dead,
forlornly roaming the field.

3 There was a time
their adorned and painted feet
walked on the terraces
of palaces;
today, they shuffle in the slushy blood
on the battlefield.

4 They more about in anguish
like demented women,
confusedly making their way
through clusters
of crows and jackals
and vultures.

5 There, see, another slender-waisted,
lovely-limbed daughter-in-law,
horrified
by the carnage
on the field,
reeling and falling in a faint.

6 O mahā-muscled one!
Lakṣmaṇa's mother
is the daughter of an earth-lord!
A princess!
I see her, and my mind
is not at peace.

7 Some recognise their brothers,
some their husbands and sons
lying dead,
and rush forward
and clasp the corpses
in their graceful arms.

8 O invincible Krishna!
Listen to the wailing
and lamentation
of the elderly women
who have lost their relatives
in this gruesome battle.

9 O mahā-powerful Krishna!
Look at them –
bewildered and helpless women,
supporting themselves
by leaning against smashed chariots
and dead horses and elephants.

10 Look at that woman there,
O Krishna,
holding in her hands a relative's
decapitated sharp-nosed head,
glittering
with earrings.

11 O blameless one!
It must be
that foolish me
and these innocent women
committed some terrible crime
in our past lives –

12 Which is the reason,
O Janārdana-Krishna,
Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira has punished us.
After all, O Vārṣṇeya-Krishna,
we die only after tasting the fruits
of good or bad karma.

13 Look at these ladies,
beautiful-faced
and beautiful-breasted,
of noble birth,
black-haired
and black-eye-browed,

14 Gifted with *gadgada*-delicate voices
like the call
of *haṁsa*-swans; today,
O Mādhava-Krishna,
they are shrill and sharp
like *sārasa*-cranes.

15 Puṇḍarīkākṣa-Krishna!
O lotus-eyed one!
See how the rays of the sun
are wilting
the lovely full-blown lotus-faces
of these young girls.

16 O Vāsudeva-Krishna!
Even the commoners
are staring today at the faces
of the wives
of my valiant musth-elephant
proud sons.

17 Shields studded with hundreds
of moon-gems,
wax-flags dazzling like the sun,
golden armour,
neck-chains
of *niṣka*-gold-coins,

18 And golden helmets –
all this wealth
of my sons lies scattered,
O Govinda-Krishna,
on the battlefield,
like libations in a sacred fire.

19 Killed by Bhīma,
slayer-of-enemies' Bhīma,
Duḥśāsana lies there,
in the sleep of death.
Bhīma ripped open his body
and drank his blood.

20 O Mādhava-Krishna!
See how Bhīma,
spurred by the insult to Draupadī
at the dice-game,
slaughtered all my brave sons
with his mace.

21 O Janārdana-Krishna!
O punisher of people!
It was to please his brother
and Karṇa
that he said to Pāñcālī-Draupadī
in the sabhā:

22 'Like Nakula, Sahadeva
and Arjuna,
you are now our slave,
Pāñcālī-Draupadī!
Come,
enter our house.'

23 Right then, Krishna,
I said to king Duryodhana:
'Son!
Śakuni is caught
in the noose of death.
Dismiss him!

24 Can't you see, my son?
He's wicked-minded, utterly.
He's a mischief-maker.
Leave him – now! –
and make peace
with the Pāṇḍavas.

25 You are wicked-minded too
if you can't see
you are infuriating Bhīma
with you arrow-sharp words,
like flaming torches
infuriating an elephant.'

26 I alone rebuked him.
Cruel Bhīma remembered
the arrow-like insults
and killed my sons
with his venomous anger
like a snake spitting poison at bulls.

27 Butchered by Bhīma,
Duḥśāsana lies sprawled
on the battlefield,
arms wide apart –
like a bull
fatally mauled by a lion.

28 It was horrible,
what Bhīma did on the field,
it was disgusting,
a deed of utter adharma –
drinking the blood
of Duḥśāsana."

SECTION NINETEEN

1 "O Mādhava-Krishna!,"
continued Gāndhārī,
"And my son Vikarṇa,
see where he lies,
his body mutilated
in hundreds of ways
by Bhīma.
Vikarṇa received respect
from the wise
and the learned.

2 Lying there, in the middle
of a host
of elephant carcasses,
he shines
like an autumn moon
encircled by clouds.

3 Look at the vultures
fruitlessly trying
to peck at the flesh
of his calloused hands
made rough by constant
wielding of the bow.

4 Look at his young widow,
O Mādhava-Krishna,
a girl of tapasyā,
helplessly trying
in vain to scare away
the greedy vultures.

5 O Mādhava-Krishna!
O bull-brave hero!
Grimed with dust he lies,
my son Vikarṇa,
young, handsome, brave,
deserving of happiness.

[XI:19:6-11]

Transcreated by P. Lal

6 *Karṇī* and *nālī* and *nārāca* arrows
have sliced
the flesh and bones
of this brilliant Bharata,
but he shines,
he shines!

7 Killed by vow-fulfilling
war-hero Bhīma,
my foe-slaying son
Durmukha
lies lifeless on the field,
facing his foes.

8 *Tāta* Krishna! Dear Krishna!
His face is half-devoured by wild beasts,
but it glows,
like the *saptami*-moon
on the seventh day
of the bright fortnight.

9 See how it shines, Krishna,
the face
of my battle-scarred heroic son!
Who can tell
why my son had to die
at the hands of his foes?

10 O gracious and serene one!
How could they have killed him,
this hero Durmukha
whom none ever defeated,
who singly
could conquer heaven?

11 Look, Madhusūdana-Krishna!
There lies Citrasena,
son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra,
who was the ideal
of expert bow-wielders –
sprawled on the field.

12 Sitting beside garlanded-
and-ornamented Citrasena,
along with hosts
of wild beasts,
are so many young girls
stricken with grief.

13 How weirdly wonderful
is this battlefield,
echoing with the wails
of women
and the howling
of wild animals.

14 O Mādhava-Krishna!
There was a time
when lovely girls attended
to the needs
of god-like Viviṁśati.
Now, he lies in the dust.

15 Can't you see him, Krishna,
Viviṁśati, there,
his armour shredded by arrows,
slain in the heat of battle,
surrounded now
by vultures?

16 The fearless hero
who penetrated the ranks
of the Pāṇḍava army
now sleeps in the war-hero bed
reserved
for the good and the noble.

17 Look, Krishna, how beautiful
like the moon it shines –
the handsome face
of Viviṁśati,
long-nosed and deep eyebrowed –
it seems to be smiling!

18 So many lovely girls attended
to his needs –
like the daughters of the gods
or gandharvas,
hundreds of daughters
pleasing the fun-loving gandharvas.

19 Slayer-of-enemies
and glorying-in-war
heroic Duḥśāsana –
was there ever any hero
to match
his prowess?

20 Pierced with arrows,
Duḥsaha lies
on the field –
looking like a hill
aflame with the flowers
of red *karṇikas.*

21 Lifeless he lies
on the field.
His golden garlands
and dazzling armour
glow with the radiance
of a forest fire
on a white mountain."

SECTION TWENTY

1 "O Keśava-Krishna!"
continued Gāndhārī.
"O Dāśārha descendant!
He was like a lion,
one and a half times superior
to his father and to you.

2 Alone, Abhimanyu pierced
the impenetrable ranks
of my son's strategy;
the death of his enemies,
he is now
death's victim.

3 But I can see, Krishna,
death has not succeeded in dimming
the lustre of Arjuna's illimitably
radiant son Abhimanyu.

4 There is his wife, Uttarā,
the blameless daughter of Virāṭa,
Gāṇḍīva-wielding
Arjuna's daughter-in-law,
grieving the loss
of her young husband.

5 Virāṭa's daughter,
Abhimanyu's wife,
O Krishna,
is caressing
the corpse
of her husband.

6 His face had the glory
of a full-blown lotus,
the neck of the son
of Subhadrā was shaped
like a conch –
the illustrious

7 Ravishingly figured lovely
Uttarā smells it
and embraces his body;
earlier too, flushed with honey-wine,
she used, shyly,
to embruce him, like now.

8 Today, Krishna,
she removes the gold armour
from the body
of her husband,
and stares
at his blood-drenched flesh.

9 As she does so,
the poor girl
calls out your name:
'O lotus-eyed Krishna!
He had eyes just like yours.
And he is dead.

10 O blameless Krishna!
In strength, valour,
energy and looks,
he was just like you.
And now he lies dead
on the field.'

11 Then she tells her husband:
'O my handsome husband!
You slept in beds covered only
with softest *raṅku*-deerskin –
are you comfortable
lying on the naked earth?

12 You lie there
with your arms spread out –
gold-*aṅgada*-covered arms,
elephant-trunk-shaped arms,
arms calloused with slaps
of frequently pulled bowstrings.

13 How utterly worn out
must you be
to sleep so soundly –
for, look, how I cry,
and never once
do you reply.

14 O my noble husband!
What wrong have I done
that you avoid me so?
Remember how you used
to call out to me
even from a distance?

15 O my noble husband!
Where have you gone,
leaving us all grieving –
your mother Subhadrā,
and your *pitṛ*-elders
glorious like gods?'

16 Look, she caresses the head
of Abhimanyu, and
feels his blood-drenched hair,
and speaks
to her husband
as if he was alive, saying:

17 'Vāsudeva-Krishna's nephew,
son of Arjuna,
wielder of the Gāṇḍīva –
how did all those
mahā-chariot-heroes
dare to kill you?

18 *Dhik* on those criminals
of cruel karma –
Kṛpa, Karṇa, Jayadratha, Droṇa
and Droṇa's son!
Shame on them
for making me a widow!

19 What happened to the conscience
of all those
bull-brave chariot-heroes?
They killed
a lone opponent –
and ruined my life.

20 How could it happen?
O my brave husband,
so many to protect you –
and they left you unprotected,
the Pāñcālas and Pāṇḍavas,
and stood by, watching.

21 Seeing you singled out
and slaughtered,
how is it
that your brave-as-a-tiger
father Arjuna
is still very much alive?

22 O my lotus-eyed husband!
Without you,
how will Pṛthā-Kuntī's sons
find happiness
by killing their enemies
and gaining a kingdom?

23 The realm you have gone to,
wielding war-weapons –
I will go there too, soon,
using dharma and the power
of deep self-discipline.
Wait for me, my husband.

24 Very difficult it is to die,
they say,
unless death calls you.
That is why
miserable, unfortunate me
is still alive.

25 O tiger-among-men!
In the realm
of the *pitṛs*, which lovely girl
like me
are you going to charm
with sweet words?

26 When you reach heaven,
which apsarās
are you going to seduce
with your smile,
your good looks
and sweet words?

27 Son of Subhadrā!
When you sport
with apsarās in the realm
of the good
and the virtuous,
be good and remember me.

28 In this world, my brave husband,
I had only
six months with you.
Only six –
come seventh month,
and you are dead.'

29 These are the words
of grief-stricken Uttarā
as the royal ladies
of Matsya-rājā
try to take her away
from the battlefield.

30 But they themselves
are lost in grief
and wailing despair
as they pull her away,
for they have seen
Virāṭa lying dead.

31 Clawing at and biting
his blood-sacked corpse,
mutilated by the arrows
of Droṇa,
are vultures and jackals
and crows.

32 Black eyes beautified
with collyrium,
the grieving wives of Virāṭa
desperately try
to drag his body away,
but in vain.

33 Haggard with lamentation
and fatigue,
the faces of the queens,
afflicted
with the heat of the sun,
are pale and wan.

34 They were all so young –
Uttara, Abhimanyu,
Sudakṣiṇa of Kamboja,
and handsome Lakṣmaṇa.
All dead.
Look at them!

35 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Look at Lakṣmaṇa
Where he lies dead
Over there,
On the battlefield."

SECTION TWENTY-ONE

1 "Look at the mahā-chariot-hero,
mahā-archer Vaikartana-Karṇa,"
continued Gāndhārī, "a blazing fire
snuffed out by radiant Pārtha-Arjuna.

2 Bringer of death to so many excellent
chariot-heroes, Vaikartana-Karṇa
lies drenched in blood on the field,
himself a victim of death.

3 A mahā-powerful mahā-archer
was Karṇa,
always aggressive and confident,
always heroic,
but he was cut down by Arjuna
the Gāṇḍīva-wielder.

4 My mahā-chariot-hero sons,
fearing Arjuna,
stationed Karṇa at their head,
to protect themselves
like a herd of elephants
behind a lead tusker –

5 That same Karṇa was cut down
by ambidexterous Savyasācī-Arjuna
like a lion
killing a tiger,
like a musth elephant
killing a musth rival.

6 O tiger-among-men!
The wives
of this hero are crowding
the battlefield,
with dishevelled hair
lamenting his death.

7 The Karṇa fear of whom made
Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
tremble, fear of whom
made him pass
thirteen years
of sleepless nights,

8 The Karṇa who, like Maghavat-Indra,
no foe could defeat,
who blazed like the doomsday fire
at the end of a yuga,
who was as unshakable
as the Himālayas,

9 The valiant Karṇa who,
O Mādhava-Krishna,
offered to protect Duryodhana –
that same Karṇa
lies on the ground, shattered,
like a storm-uprooted tree.

10 And look, there is his wife,
the mother of Vrṣasena,
beside him
on the field;
poor woman,
she says piteously weeping:

11 'The curse of your ācārya
has come true.
Your chariot-wheel stuck
in the slushy mud,
and Dhanañjaya-Arjuna
cut off your head.'

12 Hai! Hai! What a shame!
Dhik on everyone!
Seeing gold-armoured Karṇa,
mahā-muscled Karṇa,
large-minded Karṇa
lying on the ground,
the mother of Suṣeṇa,
in a frenzy of grief,
collapses beside him.

13 Devoured by beasts,
not much is left
of the body of Karṇa
the mahātmā warrior.
What little remains
is as displeasing
as the sight of the moon
on the fourteenth night
of the dark fortnight.

14 Poor lady! She rises,
she staggers, she stands;
then, suddenly,
she falls down again.
She smells the face
of Karṇa again
and again. Woebegone,
she breaks into tears
for her lost son."

SECTION TWENTY-TWO

1 "What a host of good friends
and relatives
he had, the ruler of Avantī,"
continued Gāndhārī.
"Killed at the hands
of Bhīma,
he now has jackals and vultures
around him.

2 O Madhusūdana-Krishna!
How many heroes
he crushed – but look,
the same warrior
now lies dead, blood-drenched,
on his hero's bed.

3 How Cosmic Time Kāla
makes everything topsy-turvy!
See, this same hero
is pecked and bitten
and dragged by jackals,
kaṅka-crows and other creatures.

4 Seeing the lord of Avanti
spread-eagled
on his hero's bed,
his weeping wives
surround their lifeless
once-fierce husband.

5 Krishna, look!
There lies Pratīpa's son,
the noble-minded
mahā-archer Bāhlika,
as unmoving
as a sleeping tiger.

6 Even in death,
his face shines
with the radiance
of the *pūrṇamāsī* moon
on the fifteenth day
of the bright fortnight.

7 Keeping his promise
to avenge the murder
of his son Abhimanyu,
Pāka-slayer Indra's son Arjuna
killed Vṛhaddhakṣatra's son
Jayadratha.

8 Just see how true-to-his-vow
mahātmā Arjuna
pierced through the ranks
of eleven *akṣauhiṇīs*,
and slaughtered
the eleborately protected Jayadratha.

9 The noble-minded,
proudly confident ruler
of the territories of Sindhu
and Sauvīra now
is food, Janārdana-Krishna,
for vultures and jackals.

10 O Acyuta-Krishna!
His devoted wives
are trying to protect him,
but fearful vultures
and jackals are dragging his corpse
into that ditch.

11 But they are forming a ring
around mahā-muscled Jayadratha
to save him – the ladies
of Sindhu
and Sauvīra and Kāmboja
and Yavana.

12 O Janārdana-Krishna!
The Pāṇḍavas
were ready to kill
the day he,
with the Kekayas,
abducted Kṛṣṇā-Draupadī,

13 But they spared him
because of Duḥśalā, his wife,
Duryodhana's sister.
Tell me, Krishna,
what prevented them
from sparing him now?

14 Today my daughter Duḥśalā,
poor young girl,
is distraught with grief.
She blames herself,
and she accuses
the Pāṇḍavas.

15 What greater grief for me,
O Krishna,
than this – to see
my little girl widowed,
and all my daughters-in-law
deprived of their lords?

16 Hai! Hai! *Dhik*!
Shame! Shame on all!
Look at terror-stricken Duḥśalā
running wild,
scouring the field
for her husband's head!

17 Singly, Jayadratha fought off
all the Pāṇḍavas
seeking to protect Abhimanyu,
and decimated
their army, and now death
has claimed him.

18 Look at all
these ladies
with faces as beautiful
as the moon,
surrounding
that supremely invincible hero,
now laid low,
lying on the field
like a dead musth elephant."

SECTION TWENTY-THREE

1 "*Tāta*! Dear Krishna!"
continued Gāndhārī.
"Over there lies Śalya,
Nakula's maternal uncle,
killed by Yudhiṣṭhira,
who is a man of dharma.

2 O bull-brave hero!
This mahā-chariot-hero
rājā of Madra always
used to compare himself to you.
Today he's dead,
asleep for ever.

3 *Tāta*! He was Karṇa's charioteer.
He played foul with Karṇa,
because he wanted
the Pāṇḍavas to win.

4 Aho! What a shame!
Dhik on everyone!
For crows are now pecking
his full-moon, handsome,
lotus-petal-eyed,
smooth-skinned face.

5 O Krishna!
Birds are pecking
at Śalya's protruding tongue,
lolling like molten gold
from his handsome
radiant face.

6 The ladies of his family
sit around
the rājā of Madra,
radiant Śalya
killed by Yudhiṣṭhira,
and weep and weep.

7 These Kṣatriya ladies
in fine-woven dresses,
from bull-brave Kṣatriya families,
surround
the bull-brave Madra rājā
in excess of grief.

8 The wives of Śalya
gather
round their fallen lord
like young she-elephants
around an elephant
stuck in a slushy swamp.

9 O delighter-of-the-Vṛṣṇis!
This is the Śalya
who gave shelter
to the shelterless,
now riddled with arrows,
on his hero's bed.

[XI:23:10-15]

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10 There, on the field,
lies rājā Bhagadatta,
śrīmān lord
of a mountainous kingdom,
clutching firmly
an elephant-hook.

11 On his head
is a golden circlet,
enhancing the beauty
of his hair.
Wild beasts
are gnawing at him.

12 Fierce and horripilating
as the battle
between Śakra-Indra
and Vṛtra
was the clash between Pārtha-Arjuna
and Bhagadatta.

13 Mahā-muscled Bhagadatta
almost overcame
Dhanañjaya-Arjuna,
but Kuntī's son
succeeded in the end
in killing him.

14 Than whom there is none
more powerful and valiant
in this world –
that brutally brave Bhīṣma
is also a victim
of the war.

15 Look, Krishna, Śāntanu's son
sleeping on the field,
radiant like the sun
toppling from the sky
at the end of a yuga
of Cosmic Time Kāla.

16 O Keśava-Krishna!
This sun-bright man
scorched his enemies
with the heat of his weapons,
and has left, like the sun
setting in the west.

17 See this hero whose dharma
was as profound
as that of Devāpi;
he sleeps now,
like a hero,
on a bed of arrows.

18 On his unique bed of *karṇi*,
nālīka and *nārāca* arrows
he reposes,
like Skanda-Kārtikeya
on a clump
of *śara*-reeds.

19 No soft cotton pillow
for Gaṅgā's son Bhīṣma –
he rests his head
on an excellent pillow
of three arrows supplied
by Gāṇḍīva-wielding Arjuna.

20 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Sleeping here is semen-controlling
Śāntanu's son Bhīṣma,
mahā-illustrious
incomparable-in-war fulfiller
of his father's wish.

21 *Tāta*! Dear Krishna!
An all-wise dharmātmā,
with insight into far and near,
human yet god-like,
Bhīṣma has not yet surrendered
his *prāṇa*-life-breath.

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22 If Śāntanu's son can be killed
by an enemy's arrows,
what can one say
except war is no respecter
of the skilled or the learned
or the valiant.

23 The Pāṇḍavas asked,
and Bhīṣma, wise-in-dharma
and truth-speaking hero,
revealed to them
the manner
of his death.

24 This is the same Bhīṣma,
once the saviour
of the Kaurava dynasty,
mahā-intelligent Bhīṣma,
now laid low,
along with the Kauravas.

25 O Mādhava-Krishna!
When bull-brave Devavrata,
Bhīṣma goes to heaven,
who will the Kauravas turn to,
to resolve
their problems of dharma?

26 Look at Droṇa also,
slain in battle,
Arjuna's ideal teacher,
Sātyaki's ācārya,
the supreme guru
of the Kauravas.

27 O Mādhava-Krishna!
He was as expert
in the four kinds of weapons
as Tridaśeśvara-Indra
and mahā-valiant
Bhārgava-Paraśurāma.

28 By his grace, Bībhatsu Arjuna
performed
the most dreadful deeds of heroism.
Now he is dead.
His weapons were not able
to save him.

29 With him as their support,
the Kauravas dared
to challenge the Pāṇḍavas.
Weapons-expert
has been cut down
by weapons.

30 Like a raging fire
he swept through
the ranks of the Pāṇḍavas.
Now Droṇa,
like a spent fire,
lies lifeless on the field.

31 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Dead he may be,
but his bow-grip is tight,
his finger-protectors
have not come loose –
he looks as if alive.

32 O Keśava-Krishna!
Like Prajāpati-Brahmā
never separated from the Vedas,
Droṇa was never separated
from weapons
and the four Vedas.

33 Praised by professional bards
and chanters of eulogies,
and venerated by disciples,
the beautiful
and worshippable feet of Droṇa
are chewed today by jackals.

[XI:23:34-39]

34 O slayer-of-the-antigod-Madhu!
Madhusūdana-Krishna!
See Kṛpī, Droṇa's desolated wife,
sitting grief-afflicted
near her husband,
slain by Drupada's son Dhṛṣṭadyumna.

35 See, with her hair loose,
and drooping face,
as she wails continuously,
paying her last respects
to her husband Droṇa,
finest of arms-wielders.

36 O Keśava-Krishna!
Dhṛṣṭadyumna's arrows
shredded the armour of Droṇa.
Hair dishevelled,
the brahmacāriṇī wife mourned
her mutilated husband.

37 Poor Kṛpī, illustrious lady,
lovely lady,
shattered by the pain
of her bereavement,
confusedly tries to perform
the last rites.

38 The funeral pyre is kindled
on all sides,
Droṇa's body placed on it,
and the chanters
prepare to sing songs
from the Sāma-veda.

39 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Head-hair-knotted
brahmacārīs prepare the pyre
with piles of bows,
śakti-spears,
and chariot-seats,

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40 And arrows of all kinds.
Weeping, they place
illimitably radiant Droṇa
on the lit pyre,
chanting sacred verses
as they do so.

41 There are others also
chanting and singing verses
from the Sāma.
And Droṇa is offered
as oblation in the purifying
Hutāśana-fire.

42 Now, with Kṛpī, in front,
the twice-born pupils of Droṇa
half-circle the pyre
in *pradakṣiṇa,*
and proceed to the banks
of the Gaṅgā."

SECTION TWENTY-FOUR

1 "O Mādhava-Krishna!"
continued Gāndhārī.
"There lies Bhūriśravas,
Somadatta's son,
killed by Yuyudhāna-Sātyaki,
and pecked at by birds.

2 See, Janārdana-Krishna,
how grief-stricken Somadatta
rails at mahā-archer Yuyudhāna-Sātyaki –
so it seems.

3 And the blameless mother
of Bhūriśravas,
herself bewildered,
see, is frantically
trying to reason
with her husband:

4 'Mahārāja! O my husband!
How fortunate you are
that you were spared the horror
of witnessing the yugāntā-doom
of the Bharata dynasty,
the end of the Kuru family!

5 Fortunate you are indeed
to be spared
witnessing the slaughter
of your yajña-pole-bannered,
countless-yajña-performing,
lavish-*dakṣiṇā*-giving son.

6 Fortunate you are, mahārāja,
to be spared
the sight of your widowed
daughters-in-law
screaming their agony like
shrill sārasī-cranes.

7 Wearing a single dress,
your son's wives,
some even half-dressed,
black tresses awry,
are running wild, husbands dead,
and sons dead.

8 You are fortunate indeed
not to witness
the gory sight of Arjuna
slicing off
your son's arm,
which now beasts are devouring.

9 Fortuate you are not to see
Bhūriśravas and Śala
who perished together –
nor all your daughters-in-law
roaming
the field in confusion.

10 Very fortunate indeed
you did not see
your yajña-pole-bannered
mahātmā son
on his shattered golden-
umbrella-ed chariot.

11 The black-collyrium-eyed
lovely wives
of Bhūriśravas sit
circling him,
lamenting the death
of their husband.

12 O Keśava-Krishna!
Overwhelmed by grief,
they weep
on and on,
and fall in a faint
in front of him.

13 They say: "How could even
dreadful-deed-doer
Bībhatsu-Arjuna
do such a dreadful deed? –
To slice with deceit the arm
of a lord of yajña!

14 Even more dreadful
was what Sātyaki did.
He killed with his sword
a calm-ātmaned man
absorbed in the *prāya*-vow
of a fast unto death.

15 Two men used adharma
to slaughter you,
a man of dharma!
In a sabhā
of respectable men,
what will he say –

16 How will Sātyaki justify
his heinous crime?" '
O Mādhava-Krishna!
This is how the wives
of yajña-pole-bannered
Bhūriśravas accuse Sātyaki.

17 The chief queen of yajña-pole-bannered
Bhūriśravas
takes his severed arm in her lap,
and the slim-waisted beauty
piteously weeps, saying:

18 'This is the arm that killed
heroes in battle,
granted favours and protection
to friends,
gifted thousands of cows
and decimated Kṣatriyas.

19 This is the hand that fingered
my necklace,
caressed my breasts,
stroked my navel, thighs and hips,
and removed
my *nīvī*-waist-covering.

20 While Vāsudeva-Krishna looked on,
Pārtha-Arjuna
of consummate karma
sliced off this arm without warming,
while it was engaged
in fighting another.

21 O punisher-of-people
Janārdana-Krishna!
How will you explain this
to decent men?
How will Kirīṭin-Arjuna
explain his mahā-deed?'

22 The lovely-limbed lady said this,
and kept silent.
Her co-queens sympathise with her,
like a mother-in-law
sympathising with and consoling
a daughter-in-law.

23 Over there is Śakuni,
the truly valiant
rājā of Gāndhāra,
killed by Sahadeva.
Maternal uncle killed
by his nephew.

24 What a fabulous māyā-maker
was Śakuni –
hundreds of thousands
of tricks of māyā,
all burnt to ashes by the power
of Pāṇḍava Sahadeva.

25 What a wizard of māyā he was!
What a trickster!
He defeated Yudhiṣṭhira in the sabhā,
won the dice-game,
gained a kingdom –
and lost his own life!

26 Once soothed by the breeze
of golden
double-handled fans,
Śakuni today
lies on the field,
fanned by flapping birds.

27 Who perfected his gambling skill,
Krishna,
in order to ensure the doom of my sons,
that Śakuni-bird
has become the feast today
of *śakunta*-birds.

28 This is the man
who engineered
the bitter hatred
that led to the doom
of my sons
and his friends and relatives.

29 *Prabhu*! Lord Krishna!
The thing is – wicked
Weapons-wielding Śakuni
will get the same heaven
my weapons-wielding sons
will attain.

30 O Madhusūdana-Krishna!
My fear is
that in heaven too
Śakuni will create
bad blood between
my gullible sons."

SECTION TWENTY-TWO

1 "O Mādhava-Krishna!" continued Gāndhārī.
"The bull-shouldered, formidable ruler
of Kāmboja, who deserves the finest beds
of Kāmboja, lies on the filthy ground.

2 Seeing his sandalpaste-anointed arms
running red with blood,
his grief-stricken wife weeps and weeps
in ceaseless anguish.

3 'Such graceful palms and fingers!
When your arms,
strong as *parigha*-iron-clubs
embraced me,'
she says, 'I was transported
to pure ecstasy.

4 O lord-of-men! Janeśvara!
Without you,
what will happen to me?'
Her lover dead,
unhusbanded, she sits there,
softly sobbing.

5 Like garlands of flowers exposed
to bright sun
are all these ladies standing
in the open,
but look, their loveliness
does not fade.

6. O Madhusūdana-Krishna!
Look, here lies
the valiant king of Kaliṅga,
his mahā-arms
glittering with armlets
and other ornaments.

7 Surrounded by his bereaved wives
who are crying
their hearts out in grief,
O Janārdana-Krishna,
lies, over there, Jayatsena,
the ruler of Magadha.

8 O Janārdana-Krishna!
I hear
the mind-and-ear-piercing wails
of these ladies
of Magadha,
and I feel faint.

9 They loiter about,
these ladies of Magadha,
weeping on the field,
their dresses and ornaments
in disarray,
who deserve the finest luxuries.

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10 There lies Bṛhadbala,
the Kosala prince,
surrounded
by his bereaved wives,
each grieving
for their slain husband.

11 See them plucking
from the corpse of their lord
the arrows
Abhimanyu shot at him fiercely,
and falling in a faint
as they do so.

12 O Mādhava-Krishna!
In the heat
of the sun
the faces of these lovely girls
seem to me
like withered lotuses.

13 The small boys lying there
are Dhṛṣṭadyumna's sons,
brave boys,
killed by Droṇa,
five Kekaya brothers
slain in battle.

14 The earth seems to be ablaze
with the glory
of these gold-armoured,
red-bannered
and colourfully garlanded
chariot-heroes.

15 Droṇa was the blazing fire,
his chariot the fire-altar,
bow the flames,
arrows, spears and maces
the oblations,
the brothers flame-consumed insects.

16 They are all dead now,
the five Kekaya brothers,
slain by Droṇa,
lying there on the field
in an eternal
companionable sleep.

17 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Look, sprawled there
is Drupada, killed by Droṇa,
like a mahā-elephant
in a forest
killed by a mahā-lion.

18 O Krishna-Puṇḍarīkākṣa,
lotus-eyed one!
The white umbrella
of the Pāñcāla-rājā
is gleaming like an enchanting
autumn moon.

19 They are leaving now,
the afflicted wives
and daughters-in-law
of Drupada, the old king,
after doing *pradakṣiṇa*
around his funeral pyre.

20 Over there, the grieving queens
of the bull-brave
mahā-archer ruler of Cedi,
Dhṛṣṭaketu,
killed by Droṇa,
are taking his body to the pyre.

21 O Madhusūdana-Krishna!
Mahā-archer Dhṛṣṭaketu
repulsed Droṇa's weapons
on the battlefield;
now, like a flood-swept tree,
he lies there, inert.

22 Thousands of enemies fell
at the hands
of the valiant mahā-chariot-hero
rājā of Cedi –
now he joins them
in eternal sleep.

23 O Hṛṣīkeśa-Krishna!
Slain along
with his relatives
and all his soldiers,
see the birds now pecking
at the Cedi-rājā's corpse.

24 O Dāśārha-Krishna!
He was the truly valiant son
of Śiśupāla, whose mother
was Vasudeva's sister Śrutaśravā.
The Cedi-queens are weeping
over his corpse.

25 See, Hṛṣīkeśa-Krishna,
how brutally
Droṇa's arrows sliced the body
of the handsome-faced,
beautiful-earringed son
of Dhṛṣṭaketu.

26 On the field of battle,
Madhusūdana-Krishna,
he was always at the side
of his father.
In death too, he sleeps
next to his father.

27 O mahā-muscled Krishna!
My son's son too,
crusher-of-heroic-enemies
Lakṣmaṇa
has done the same
with his father Duryodhana.

28 O Mādhava-Krishna!
Look, over there
are Vinda and Anuvinda
of Avanti,
toppled like two flowering śāla-trees
at winter end.

29 They lie there, two heroes
with large bull-eyes,
with golden armour
aṅgada-armlets,
garlanded, clutching arrows,
swords and bows.

30 O Krishna!
You and all the Pāṇḍavas
are unkillable.
You escaped death
from Droṇa, Bhīṣma,
Vaikartana-Karṇa, Kṛpa,

31 Duryodhana,
Droṇa's son Aśvatthāman,
the Sindhu-rājā Jayadratha,
Somadatta,
Vikarṇa
and valiant Kṛtavarman.

32 The bull-brave heroes
who killed gods
on the battlefield
are now themselves dead.
Such is the whirling
of Cosmic Time Kāla.

33 O Mādhava-Krishna!
There is nothing
that fate cannot do –
otherwise how could so many Kṣatriyas
wipe out so many
other bull-brave Kṣatriyas?

34 The day you returned
to Upaplavya,
leaving unfinished your efforts
to make peace –
that day was the death day
of my sons.

35 That day wise Vidura
and Śāntanu's son Bhīṣma
said to me:
'You must learn
not to love your sons
too much.'

36 How could the words of both
be ever untrue,
O Janārdana-Krishna?
It did not take long
for all my sons to perish
in fiery battle."

37 O Bharata Janamejaya!
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
Saying this, agonising Gāndhārī,
all her powers
of endurance failing,
fell on the earth in a faint.

38 Wrath racked her every limb.
Grief for her sons
wrecked her sense-numbed reason.
In her fury
she cast the entire blame
on Śauri-Krishna.

39 "Janārdana-Krishna!" she said.
"Persecuter of people!
The Pāṇḍavas and Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons
have devoured each other –
and you stood by
and did nothing!

40 You had the śakti!
You had the means,
you had the awesome power!
You are eloquent in śruti,
you could easily
have convinced them.

41 Madhusūdana-Krishna!
You deliberately destroyed
the Kaurava dynasty!
You must taste
the bitter fruits of this,
O mahā-muscled one!

42 I curse you!
O cakra-and-mace-wielder!
Cakra-gadā-dhara!
By the power of my tapasyā
for my husband,
I curse you!

43 O Govinda-Krishna!
You stood by and watched
the doom of the Kauravas
and Pāṇḍavas. So –
you will become the doom
of your race.

44 Thirtysix years from now,
Madhusūdana-Krishna,
your kinsmen and counsellors
and friends will quarrel
and slaughter each other.
And you, wandering in a forest,

45 Desolate, unprotected,
demeaned in everyone's eyes,
you will die too,
you will die
a shameful,
disgusting death.

46 And like these ladies
of the Bharata dynasty,
your women too will weep
and fall on the corpses
of their sons
and their husbands."

47 Hearing this horrifying curse
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
mahā-minded
Vāsudeva-Krishna smiled
and said
to Gāndhārī-devī:

48 "Kṣatriya lady!
I knew this would happen.
What you say
will of course happen.
Fate has decreed
the doom of the Vṛṣṇis.

49 Lovely lady! *Śubhe*!
Only I can bring about
the doom of the Vṛṣṇis.
Neither men nor gods
nor Dānava-antigods
can destroy

50 The Yādavas –
they will destroy themselves."
Dāśārha-Krishna's words unnerved
the Pāṇḍavas.
They were deeply troubled.
Despair gripped them.

SECTION TWENTY-SIX

1 "Gāndhārī!" said Vāsudeva-Krishna
"Get up! Stand up!
Steady your mind against grief.
You are the cause
of the doom of the Kauravas.

2 You know only too well
how you encouraged
ill-ātmaned, envious
and proud Duryodhana
in his career of mischief-making.

3 You never prevented your cruel son
who spurned the advice of elders.
Why are you trying to foist
your own misdeeds on me?

4 Whoever weeps over who's dead,
what's lost,
or what's over and done with,
goes from one grief to another,
becoming a victim
of double futility.

5 A Brahmin lady gives birth
to children for tapasyā,
a cow has calves to bear burdens,
a mare conceives her young
for speedy galloping,
a Śūdra woman bears slaves,
a Vaiśya cattle-rearers, a princess
like you death-worthy heroes."

6 Gāndhārī heard these displeasing words
of Vāsudeva-Krishna (continued
Vaiśampāyana), and kept silent.
Her eyes brimmed with tears.

7 Trying to overcome the pain
of ignorant grief,
the rāja-ṛṣi dharmātmā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
said
to the Dharmarāja Pāṇḍava
Yudhiṣṭhira:

8 "Son of Pāṇḍu!
You know how many
have survived the war.
If you know
how many have perished,
then tell me."

9 "Myriads of them have perished,"
replied Yudhiṣṭhira,
"in this war, O rājā –
sixty six crores
and twenty thousand
have died in battle.

10 O Indra-among-rājās!
Rājendra Dhṛtarāṣṭra!
Apart from these,
twentyfour thousand
one hundred and sixtyfive
are missing."

11 O finest-āmong-men!
Mahā-muscled Yudhiṣṭhira!
I think you know everything.
Tell me:
all those who have perished –
where do they go?"

12 "Those who cheerfully perished,"
replied Yudhiṣṭhira,
"in battle, attain such realms
as are enjoyed
by Indra,
the rājā of the gods.

13 Those who unhappily perished,
O Bharata descendant,
having made up their minds to die,
attain the realms
such as those enjoyed
by the gandharvas.

14 Those who perished by weapons,
while begging for mercy,
or fleeing the field,
attain the realms
such as those enjoyed
by the Guhyakas.

15 And those mahātmā heroes who,
assailed by enemies,
against heavy odds, weapon-less
stood their ground,
because turning their backs
they considered to be shameful,

16 And fell to the sharp arrows
of their enemy –
these incomparable upholders
of Kṣatriya-dharma
attain the radiant realm
of Brahmā.

17 And then there are those,
O rājā, so many
who perish willynilly in battle –
they are born again
in the region known
as Uttara-kuru."

18 "My son, what special power
do you have, O mahā-muscled one,"
asked Dhṛtarāṣṭra, "that makes
you so knowledgeable?
If I deserve to know this,
then tell me."

19 "This is the result of a boon
I obtained,"
replied Yudhiṣṭhira, "when,
on your instruction,
I went on my pilgrimage
to the sacred *tīrthas.*

20 It was deva-ṛṣi Lomaśa
who bestowed on me
the gift of *anusmṛti.*
My spiritual insight
I gained through the practice
of jñāna-yoga."

21 "O Bharata descendant!"
said Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
"So many heroes lie dead here,
some with friends, some without.
Will you perform
their funeral rites?

22 *Tāta*! Dear Yudhiṣṭhira!
Some have none left
to do their last *saṁskāras,*
others have no *agnihotṛ* fire.
In such cases,
what do we do?

23 And those whose corpses
are being devoured
by vultures and jackals –
it is essential,
Yudhiṣṭhira, that we perform
their funeral rites also."

24 O mahārāja Janamejaya!
(continued Vaiśampāyana)
Accordingly, Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira summoned
Duryodhana's purohita Sudharman,
his own purohita Dhaumya,
the Sūta Sañjaya,

25 Mahā-discerning Vidura,
the Kaurava Yuyutsu,
Indrasena and other charioteers,
and advised
all the servants
and Sūtas:

26 "See that the funeral rites
of all
are properly performed.
Not one body
must be left unsanctified
on the field."

27 Following the order
of Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira,
Kṣattā-Vidura, the Sūta Sañjaya,
and Dharmya,
with Indrasena
and others,

28 Collected sandalwood,
aguru-aloe-perfume,
sacred wood, ghee, scents
and other material,
including robes
and expensive silk-lengths,

29 Including also firewood
of all kinds,
remnants of smashed
war-chariots,
and any number of discarded
war-weapons,

30 And methodically constructed
the funeral pyres,
and respectfully and carefully
cremated
all the kings in proper order,
beginning with the eldest.

31 Rājā Duryodhana
and all
his mahā-chariot-hero brothers,
rājā Śalya,
rājā Bhūriśravas,

32 And, O Bharata-descendant,
rājā Jayadratha,
Abhimanyu,
Duḥśāsana's son Sudarśana,
Lakṣmaṇa,
the earth-lord Dhṛṣṭaketu,

33 Vṛhanta,
Somadatta,
braver-than-a-hundred Sṛñjaya,
rājā Kṣemadhanvan,
Virāṭa,
Drupada,

34 Śikhaṇḍin,
Pārṣata-Dhṛṣṭadyumna
of the Pāñcālas,
Yudhāmanyu,
illimitably valiant
Uttamaujas,

35 Kausalya-Bṛhadbala,
Draupadī's five sons,
Saubala-Śakuni,
Acala,
Vṛṣaka,
the earth-lord Bhagadatta,

36 Revengeful Vaikartana-Karṇa
and his sons,
the five mahā-archer princes
of Kekaya,
as well as
the mahā-chariot-hero Trigarta,

37 The Indra-among-rākṣasas
Ghatoṭkaca,
and Baka's brother
the Indra-among-rākṣasas
Alambuṣa,
the earth-lord Jalasaṁdha,–

38 These and thousands
of other earth-lords
were cremated
in the funeral pyres
with streaming libations
of ghee.

39 Some mahātmās were cremated
with *pitṛ-medha* oblations,
to the accompaniment of chants
from the Sāma-veda
and others paid their respects
through inconsolable grief.

40 It was a night
of terrifying grief,
echoing with the chants
of Sāma and Ṛk Vedas,
and the ceaseless wailing
of women.

41 The bright-blazing
smokeless fires
of the cremation pyres
looked like planets
blurred by clouds
in the sky.

42 Those from distant lands who had perished,
and had none
to perform their last rites –
thousands of them –
their bodies were piled up
in numerous heaps.

43 On advice from Yudhiṣṭhira,
serene-minded,
affectionate workers built pyres for them
with ghee-and-oil-smeared sticks,
and Vidura lit
the funeral flame.

44 In this way,
the Kuru-rājā Yudhiṣṭhira
performed
their last rites;
after which,
placing Dhṛtarāṣṭra
in front,
they proceeded
to the banks
of the Gaṅgā.

SECTION TWENTY-SEVEN

1 They proceeded to the Gaṅgā
(continued Vaiśampāyana),
benevolent river, sacred-watered river,
many-laked river, heart-delighting,
mahā-vistaed, mahā-manifesting,
mahā-forested river.

2 Removing their ornaments,
dresses, and head-covers,
fathers, brothers, grandsons
and other relatives

3 Performed the rite of sprinkling water
for dead friends and sons,
as did the disconsolate
Kaurava ladies
on their deceased husbands
and relatives.

4 Those conversant with dharma
sprinkled water-homage
on their deceased friends.
While the wives of heroes
were performing the rite
for their husbands,

5 The waters of the Gaṅgā
shone with splendour,
a wonderful vast brilliance,
No festival there, no joy –
but an eye-dazzling feast
of amplitude,

6 Inspired by the wives of heroes
on the banks
of the Gaṅgā. O mahārāja!
Then it was
that sorrow-stricken Kuntī,
suddenly,

7 Sobbing, said softly
to her sons:
"That hero,
that mahā-archer,
that chariot-leader
of all chariot-leaders,

8 Whom Arjuna defeated,
who had all the auspicious marks
of a true hero,
who you, O sons of Pāṇḍu,
thought was the son
of a charioteer, Rādhā's son,

9 Who shone in the battlefield
with the glory
of the sun the day-maker,
who singly
had the courage to fight you
and your entire army,

10 Who was such a brilliant leader
of the army
of Duryodhana,
whom no earth-lord
in the world could equal
in valour,

11 To whom honour was more precious
than life,
who never fied
from the battlefield –
that firm-in-truth hero
Karṇa

12 Was your brother,
who deserves to receive
your water-homage ritual.
He was your elder brother,
born of the radiant sun-god
in my womb

13 With flesh-armour
and earrings.
He shone with the shine of the sun."
These painful words
of their mother
made the Pāṇḍavas

14 Suffer even more.
They mourned grievously
for their brother Karṇa.
Kuntī's son,
tiger-among-men
Yudhiṣṭhira

15 Sighed heavily
like a *pannaga*-serpent,
and said to his mother:
"Who was like an ocean,
with arrows as waves, flag vortex,
two arms like crocodiles,

16 Slapping arm-pits the ocean's roar,
his mahā-chariot
a mahā-whirlpool,
whose arrows
none could escape
except Dhanañjaya-Arjuna –

17 How did that son come
to be born
in your divine womb?
The strength
of whose massive arms
always afflicted us,

18 The strength of whose arms
always protected
the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra –
how did you hide
the secret from us,
like a cloth-covered flame?

19 He protected them,
like Gāṇḍīva-wielding Arjuna
protecting us.
The strength of his arms
baffled even the most
powerful earth-lords.

20 No chariot-hero ever came
even near the valour
of Kuntī's son Karṇa
That finest of the finest
of arms-wielding warriors –
was he really our brother?

21 How did that incomparably
formidable hero
come to be your son?
Aho!
By keeping this secret from us,
you have destroyed us.

22 The death of Karṇa
has desolated us with grief.
The death
of Abhimanyu,
the slaughter
of Draupadī's five sons,

23 The massacre of the Pāñcālas,
the Kaurava carnage –
a hundred times more painful
than all of those
is the pain
of this death.

24 I burn in the agony
over Karṇa's death
as if consumed by fire.
If only
I had known this earlier,
heaven would have been ours,

25 The doom of the Kauravas
would not
have taken place!"
Profusely lamenting
in this way,
Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira,

26 O rājā Janamejaya,
slowly performed
the water-ritual obsequies
for Karṇa.
All the men and women
gathered there

27 To perform the water-ritual
burst into wails
of copious grief.
All the wives
of Karṇa
with their families

28 Were then called
by the discerning Kuru-lord Yudhiṣṭhira
with brotherly love,
and with them
dharmātmā Yudhiṣṭhira did
the *preta-kṛtya* ritual;

29 Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira
performed it
as ordained by tradition,
saying, "Not knowing
the secret made me responsible
for the murder of my eldest brother.
Let no woman
from today keep a secret."

30 Saying this, visibly agitated
Yudhiṣṭhira rose,
with his brothers,
from the waters of the Gaṅgā.

This internationally accepted system of Roman transliteration of the Devanāgari alphabet is followed in this transcreation.

VOWELS

Guttural	अ	आ	
	a	ā	
Palatal	इ	ई	
	i	ī	
Labial	उ	ऊ	
	u	ū	
Dental	ऋ		
	ṛ		
Guttural-Palatal		ए	ऐ
	e	ei	
Guttural-Labial		ओ	औ
	o	au	

CONSONANTS

Guttural	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ	ह	:
	k	kh	g	gh	ṅ	h	ḥ
Palatal	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ	य	श
	c	ch	j	jh	ñ	y	ś
Lingual	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण	र	ष
	ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ	r	ṣ
Dental	त	थ	द	ध	न	ल	स
	t	th	d	dh	n	l	s
Labial	प	फ	ब	भ	म	व	
	p	ph	b	bh	m	v	

Anusvāra = ṁ

C O N T E N T S

CANTO XI

Strīparva

The Book of Lamentation

Chapter 80 *Visokaparva (Jalapradānikaparva(n)* in Cal.Ed. Chap. 85) : Relating to the survivors' 'exemption from grief' for the deceased warriors. Sec. 1–8 [Cr.Ed.]; 1-15 (Cal.Ed.)

Chapter 81 *Striparva (Strivilāpaparva(n)* Cal.Ed. Chap. 86): Relating to the lamentation of the women. Sec. 9-25 [Cr.Ed.]; 16-25 (Cal.Ed.)

*i) *Ayo Bhimabhañjanaṃ*: Destruction of *Bhima*'s iron statue by *Dhṛtarāṣṭra.*

*ii) *Uttarāvilapāḥ* : Uttara's mourning.

Chapter 82 *Śrāddhaparva(n)* (Chap. 87 in Cal.Ed.) : Relating to the funeral rites of the deceased warriors. Sec. 26 [Cr. Ed.]; 26-27 (Cal.Ed.)

Chapter 83 **Jalapradānikaparva(n)*: Relating to the offering of water to the deceased warriors.

Courtesy:

Madhusraba Dasgupta

Samsad Companion to the Mahābhārata

The Mahabhar

Atri t

Soma (Chandra

Bud

Ay

Nahu

Yay
marries Devay

(The Yadava race)

Yayati marries Devayani
↓
Yadu (& another son Anu)
↓
Vrishni (son)
↓
Devarata (son)
↓
Andhaka (son)
↓
Shura (son)

Vasudeva (son) — Kunti (daughter) marries Pandu

Balarama (son) — Krishna (son) marries Satyabhama — Subhadra (daughter) marries Arjuna
↓
Abhimanyu (son)

Krishna → Samba (son of Jambavati)

Balarama, Samba → (Line extinct)

(Satyavati's
union with the
has sons
Vichitravirya

Dhritarashtra
(son by Ambika)
↓
marries Gandhari
↓
Duryodhana
& ninetynine sons
& a daughter
Duhshala

Dhritarashtra — by union with a
Vaishya woman
↓
Yuyutsu
(youngest son)

Pandu (s

marries Ku
↓
Yudhishthira
Dharma
Bhima (son by
Arjuna (son by
Arjuna marrie

Family Tree

ῥishi

du) the Moon

n)

)

on)

n)

Sharmishtha

(The Paurava & Kaurava race)

Yayati marries Sharmishtha

↓

Puru (& 2 other sons: Druhyu & Turvasu)

↓

Dushyanta (son) marries Shakuntala

↓

Bharata (son)

↓

Hastin (son)

↓

Kuru (son)

↓

Shantanu (son) marries Satyavati

re-marriage union with Ganga

↓

Bhishma (son)

asa

her pre-marriage

Parashara: Vyasa

two widows of

ika & Ambalika)

Chitrangada
(son) (dies childless)

Vichitravirya (son)
marries Ambika & Ambalika
(their eldest sister Amba,
reborn male as Shikhandin,
kills Bhishma in the war)

Ambalika)

Vidura (son by
low caste woman)

and

Madri

↓

y

Nakula & Sahadeva
(twin sons by Ashvins)

)

a)

adra

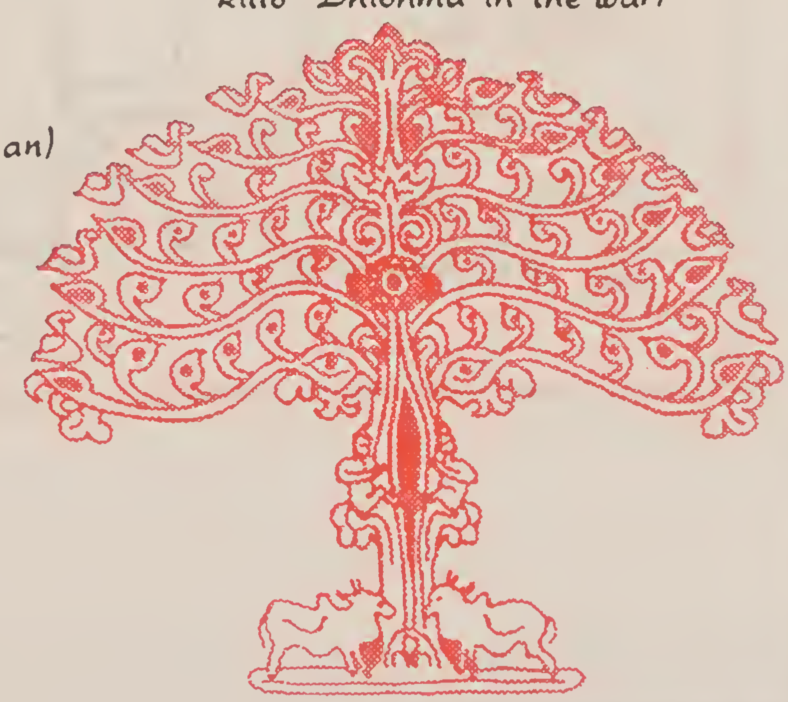
anyu (son) marries Uttara

↓

Parikshit (son)

↓

Janamejaya (son)





Sketch by P. Lal



Ārya-varta
at the time of the Mahābhārata

Sketch by P. Lal based on *The Historical Atlas of South Asia*
[University of Minnesota]

"THE DEOPS OF HONEY" PARABLE

From P. Lal: *The Man of Dharma & the Rasa of Silence*

From Homer to Virgil to the Middle Ages, which is apparently when the Mahābhārata's "Drops of Honey" parable found rot and flourished in Europe. "John of Damascus (eighth century) composed a set of fables which included the story of the Man in the Well, which he based on a set of legends describing the life of the Buddha. The work, under the name of *Barlaam and Josaphat,* was translated into Latin A. D. 1048-49. By the early thirteenth century it had found its way into the *Gesta Romanorum,* where the story of the Man in the Well appears as Chapter 168, 'On Eternal Damnation':

> 'Barlaam narrates that a sinner resembles as certain man who when afraid of a unicorn, stepped backwards into a pit; but when he had fallen he seized with his hands a little bush which was growing up from the depth and looking down, he saw at the bottom of the tree a very black well and a horrible dragon coiled around the tree and waiting for his fall with the mouth open. Moreover, as two mice, one white, the other black, were continuously gnawing the root, he felt it sway. Also, four white vipers moving forth from the place where he had fixed his foot, poisoned the air with their fatal breath. Lifting up his eyes, he saw a flow of honey dripping from the branches of the tree and forgetting the peril in which he had been placed on all sides, he gave himself up himself up completely to that sweetness. Then, when a certain friend passed him a ladder, he tarried and as the tree broke, fell into the mouth of the dragon. The latter went down into the well and devoured him there and so he died; alas, a miserable death.'

The moral of the story is expounded as follows: the unicorn (who was an elephant in the Indian story) is Death, the pit is this life, the white and black mouse are day and night, the four vipers are the four humours of the body which is the tree; the dragon is the devil, the well on the bottom is hell; the sweetness of the honey

is the delight in sinning tempting the human being; the friend is Christ, the ladder penitence which if refused leads to a precipitous fall into the Devil's mouth."

B. A. Van Nooten, in his book *The Mahābhārata* (from where I have taken this) adds: 'The purpose of the story has certainly undergone some changes, more than the details in fact. From Vidura's attempt to console old Dhṛtarāṣṭra and set him at peace with the world, it has been transformed into an eloquent admonition from the Church Militant to abide by the doctrines of its salvation. The story has been rendered into a bas-relief by the thirteenth-century Italian sculptor Benedetto Antelami, or one of his pupils. On the Porta della Vita (1260-62) of the Battistero in Prarma. Claims that Dante borrowed it for the first scene of his *Commedia* can be discounted. Through the agency of the Christian missionaries, the story reached Japan in the sixteenth century. It seems to be the only and very remote connection of that country with the Mahabharata." In using this parable to partly illustrate and evoke the rasa behind "The Fourth Finger of Feeling", I have taken the liberty of interpreting it not as a tale of philosophic consolation, but as a narrative describing a vision of near-existential despair. Experience of such total despair may be the stepping-stone for genuine philosophic calm, of the kind perhaps achieved by katharsis in Greek tragedy–if we take katharsis in its broadest possible sense.

P. Lal: *The Man of Dharma & the Rasa of Silence*
a long poem (WRITERS WORKSHOP, 1974)



P. Lāl reading the 334th weekly Sunday session of his English transcreation of Vyāsa's Mahābhārata on 2 July 2006 at G. D. Birla Sabhagar, Kolkata.

[*Sketch by Nilima Sen-Gangopadhyay*]

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Kolkata Calendar



One of the paintings on view at Tejas Art Gallery

READING SESSION

G D Birla Sabhagar

Professor P Lal reads Sanjaya's report to raja Dhritarastra of Krishna explaining to Arjuna how to simultaneously break and keep a vow, and thereby pacifying enraged Yudhisthira into a reconciliation with Arjuna, who promptly vows to kill Karna in battle, in the 417th weekly Sunday session of his sloka-by-sloka English transcreation of Vyasa's complete *Mahabharata* presented by Sanskriti Sagar, on March 23 at 11 am. P Lal reads the *Mahabharata* also on Tara TV Newz daily at 7.20 am and 7.20 pm.

THE TELEGRAPH

READING

■ **March 23 at G.D. Birla Sabhagar; 11 am:** Professor P. Lal reads Sanjaya's report of Krishna advising Arjuna how to break a vow and simultaneously keep it, and pacifying enraged Yudhisthira into reconciling with Arjuna, who vows to kill Karna, in the 417th weekly session of his sloka-by-sloka English transcreation of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*.

The Sunday Statesman

ENGAGEMENTS

- Prof P Lal reads Krishna's explanation of how to simuetanerously break and keep a vow, in the 417th sessin of his English transcreation of Vyasa's Mahabharata at s G D Birla Sabhagar, 11-00

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The Mahābhārata

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The Mahābhārata of Vyāsa

TRANSCREATED BY P. LAL

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Transcreated from Sanskrit
by P. Lal

On the following pages are facsimile reproductions of pages from different Mahābhārata fascicules (#271-278) of the Strī Parva, showing the Sanskrit notes and calligraphy fascicules and additions by P. Lal. These were prepared for the reading sessions of the transcreation, presented under the auspices of the Sanskriti Sagar in the Library of Dharma and Culture at the G.D. Birla Sabhagar in Kolkata. Started in October 1999, P. Lal has so far (February 2008) read 410 one-hour sessions, followed by question-and-answer periods of up to half an hour.

The Mahābhārata of Vyāsa

Transcreated from the Sanskrit by P. Lāl

Volume 271

The Jala-pradānika-parva Dhṛtarāṣṭra-viśoka-karaṇa in the Strī Parva

SECTION 1

1 "Duryodhana dead," said Janamejaya,
"all his soldiers dead ~ when
mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra heard this, tell me,
O muni, what did he do?

2 What did the Kaurava mahā-minded
Dharma's son, rājā Yudhiṣṭhira,
do? And what did the three survivors,
Kṛpa and the two others, do?

7 The wise also say that
physical and mental
diseases, and visible
and invisible ailments,
are the wild beasts
that haunt this forest.

8 O Bharata (Dhṛtarāṣṭra)!
Despite being victims
of these wild beasts, which
are products of their own karma,
small-minded men never
get disenchanted with saṃsāra.

9 A man may escape, O King,
the ravages
of illness and disease,
but there is no way
he can escape old age ruining
youth and beauty.

36 O descendant of Bharata!
In no way
have the Pāṇḍavas harmed you.
Your wicked sons
are the ones who despoiled
the earth.

37 May fortune favour you!
Bhadraṁ te!
At the time
of the Rājasūya yajña,
Nārada insisted
on telling Yudhiṣṭhira:

38 'The Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas
will fight
and destroy each other.
That being so,
O son of Kuntī, do
what must be done.'

17 Powerful rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
embraced tightly
with both arms the iron likeness
of wolf-waisted
Vṛkodara-Bhīma,
and crushed it.

18 Ten-thousand-elephant-strong
rājā Dhṛtarāṣṭra
crushed the statue.
Blood streaked his chest,
blood gushed
from his mouth.

19 Smeared with blood,
he collapsed,
like a red-blossoming
pārijāta-tree
uprooted toppling
on the earth.

18 Never once did I forget
the angry promise
I made to Draupadī
when she was dragged
by her hair in the sabhā
during the dice-game.

19 Had I broken my word,
O rānī,
Kṣatriya-dharma would forever
have been sullied,
so I had to do
what I did.

20 O Gāndhārī! Do not accuse me.
When we innocents
were victimised by your sons,
you kept silent.
Why are you so determined
to condemn me now?"

24 Can't you see?
Greater than the pain
of my son's death
is the pain of these widows
grieving by the side
of their slain husbands.

25 Krishna, look! There ~
Lakṣmaṇa's mother,
lovely-haired, graceful-hipped,
radiantly beautiful like
a vedi-altar, loosening her hair
in Duryodhana's arms ~

26 The same handsome arms
which enfolded her
when Duryodhana was alive,
and which gave
the noble-minded beauty
the pleasures of love.

25 O Mādhava-Krishna!
When bull-brave Devavrata-
Bhīṣma goes to heaven,
who will the Kauravas
turn to, to resolve
their problems of dharma?

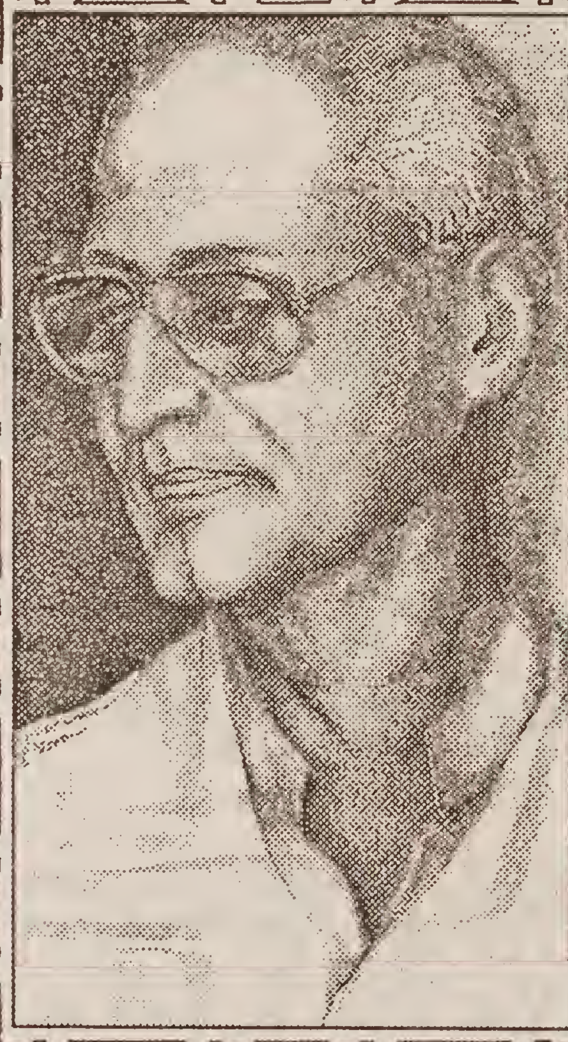
26 Look at Droṇa also,
slain in battle,
Arjuna's ideal teacher,
Sātyaki's ācārya,
the supreme guru
of the Kauravas.

27 O Mādhava-Krishna!
He was as expert
in the four kinds of weapons
as Tridaśeśvara-Indra
and mahā-valiant
Bhārgava-Paraśurāma.

42 I curse you!
O cakra-and-mace-wielder!
Cakra-gadâ-dhara!
By the power of my tapasyā
for my husband,
I curse you!

43 O Govinda-Krishna!
You stood by and watched
the doom of the Kauravas
and Pāṇḍavas. So ~
you will become the doom
of your race.

44 Thirtysix years from now,
Madhusūdana-Krishna,
your kinsmen and counsellors
and friends will quarrel
and slaughter each other.
And you, wandering in a forest,



Writers Workshop
Indian Creative Writing
in English

WRITERS WORKSHOP was founded in 1958. It consists of a group of writers who agree in principle that English has proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature, through original writing and transcreation from India, the Commonwealth, and other English-using territories. Discussions are held on Sunday morning at 162/92 Lake Gardens, Kolkata 700 045, India, and diffusion done through a series of Bird-logo books issued under the WORKSHOP imprint. Since October 1999 the Sunday one-hour morning session is devoted to a śloka-by-śloka reading by P. Lal at the Sanskriti Sagar Library in Calcutta, of his complete English transcreation of the Mahābhārata of Vyāsa, planned to continue for the next ten years, till the epic is completed. Since 1971 the WORKSHOP has laid increasing emphasis on its publishing programme. A complete, descriptive 90-page illustrated checklist of over 3200 books and cassettes is available for Rs. 20.

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WRITERS WORKSHOP ~ A Credo by P. Lal

Glory be to Mahakala. It is now 2008. I am four score. Time for some home truths. Because WRITERS WORKSHOP has close to 3200 separate titles in its checklist (published over 49 years 1958-2007), and because it has averaged around 100 titles each year since 1995, there is a misconception that it is an Indian publishing leviathan. (No other publisher in India has that many titles on its annual list.) The truth is much less awesome. WRITERS WORKSHOP has no office; it operates from my residence, from the living-room and a multi-purpose bedroom. It has no secretary; my "secretary" is a three-tiered Godrej filing cabinet. It has no editor, no "readers" to inspect, evaluate and OK typescripts; I do all three tasks. It has no proofreader; I perform the nitty-gritty of deleting, accreting and correcting. It has no "assistant" to acknowledge or follow up letters; I do all that too. It has no typewriter; I reply in longhand. (From 2004, kowtowing to the hi-tech convenience, I sometimes seek help from my computer-savvy grand-daughter Shuktara to e-mail replies to insistent and urgent enquiries for WW information.) It has no retail or wholesale distribution "outlet"; there is only a cubby-hole of a kiosk at my residence (8 feet x 4 feet roughly) called the Book Nook, where a dedicated young assistant attends to intermittent sales of WW books. This Lake Gardens kiosk opened in 1998, 40 years after WW's inception.

How then has WW survived? Without plush foundations to back it, without advertisement, without large-hearted patrons? Initially, by the skin of our teeth (1958-1964). Then (1965-1990) by my visits to hard currency lands, specially Great Britain, the USA and Australia on lecture assignments and visiting professorships on two dozen or so occasions, and pumping the shekels thus earned to keep alive a gasping ideal.

Alternative publishing is desperately needed wherever commercial publication rules. WW is *not* a professional publishing house. It does not print well-known names; it makes names known and well known, and then leaves them in the loving clutches of the so-called "free" market (which can be and is very cut-throat and very expensive). It is not sad, it is obnoxious, to plead, as publishers do, "I will not publish poetry because it does not sell." Most English book publishing today in boom-time India and outside is book-dumping. There is a nexus between high-profile PR-conscious book publishers, semi-literate booksellers, moribund public and state libraries, poorly informed and nepotistic underlings in charge of book review pages and supplements of most national newspapers and magazines, and biased bulk purchases of near worthless books by bureaucratic institutions set up–believe it or not!–to inform, educate and elevate the reading public.

Because WW goes in for serious creative writing, and because there is no satisfactory distribution network for such writing, its terms of publication are unique. I must be the only publisher in the world who knows when and where every book is sold; I have the name and address of every buyer of a WW book. Upon my acceptance of a typescript, an agreement form is sent to the writer. *All* copyright remains with the writer. Poetry appears in 350 copies; prose in 500. Ten per cent (35 copies of the poetry book, 50 of the prose) is given in lieu of royalty. The writer is also expected to make an advance purchase of 100 copies of his or her book, for sale or distribution as he or she pleases. Printing is done in Calcutta hand-operated presses, situated in the residences of their owners. The whole process is a cottage industry style low-key entrepreneurship, in the belief that small is not only beautiful but viable as well. Vanity and sponsored publishing? Yes, I am humanly vain about it and I do sponsor what I think is good writing. If any lover of literature will offer to subsidise, with no strings attached, striking new work by talented Indian poets, fiction-writers and belles-lettrists, please get in touch with me. The gesture will be acknowledged, appreciated, accepted, and implemented. Such Good Samaritan generosities, not market forces, are at the root of civilised and significant publishing the world over.

For more information, browse in the WW IndEngLit Website: www.writersworkshopindia.com

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